

Supply—Secretary of State

ness. The reason given was that they allegedly could not distinguish between rocket flare signals at night. From a practical point of view it made no difference at all, but dozens of good people who would have been excellent in every other way were turned down because of this requirement. Eventually the navy got away from the requirement when they found it did not really matter.

This is the kind of thing one has to watch and I would hope there would be a little more elasticity in the qualifications and a little more discretion left to the members of the commission so that a good many people who are qualified in many ways will not be turned down because of some minor technical requirement. I think this is something that could improve the situation for many people. I wish that the members of the commission and the Secretary of State would bear in mind that one of the biggest problems any member of the house has is in trying to find employment for so many people who are over the age of 40. They lack the technical training to get jobs in industries now, and have to try to get other positions which often they are really very well qualified to fill except for some very technical requirement.

There is one other matter about which I should like to ask the Secretary of State and which he perhaps can deal with after he discusses it with the members of the commission. I refer to the question of bilingualism in the civil service. I know this is a very touchy and sensitive subject these days but I think it would be less touchy and less sensitive if the policy in this regard was made absolutely clear by the Secretary of State. There is a great deal of suspicion and concern on the part of many people because the policy does not seem to be clear.

I think all of us will agree that for many civil service positions it is absolutely essential that the applicants be completely bilingual. With regard to people who work in Ottawa, certainly those who work in the province of Quebec, and also in parts of Ontario and other parts of Canada such as New Brunswick, there are many jobs which require these people in their daily contacts with the public and in correspondence to be completely bilingual. I do not think anybody would quarrel with that.

However, I have had a number of civil servants approach me in this regard. They wish to remain anonymous and I can understand their point of view in that respect. They have expressed concern to me, in that with regard to many competitions, which

[Mr. Nesbitt.]

seemed to involve branches of the civil service that really did not require people to be bilingual at all, it was provided that only bilingual applicants would be considered. There is great concern in many parts of Canada where the French language is not spoken that the only people who will be allowed to apply for these positions are people who speak French as well as English. From a practical point of view this gives a very decided advantage to people who come from the province of Quebec and parts of Ontario adjoining Quebec—

Mr. Grégoire: Why do they not become bilingual?

Mr. Nesbitt: I hear an interesting question from the hon. member for Lapointe and I am going to reply in a minute—as well as people who live in New Brunswick. The hon. member for Lapointe has asked an obvious question. Why do people not become completely bilingual? If the hon. member for Lapointe lived in Vancouver, Calgary or London, Ontario, he might find it rather difficult to find people there who speak French very fluently. It is just a matter of practice. I can tell the member for Lapointe that I have studied French for nine or ten years and I can read and write the language almost as well as English, but because of lack of practice in speaking the language in my own part of the country, and this applies to a good many members, it is not easy to become fluent in speaking the language unless you have the opportunity to speak it daily.

Mr. Grégoire: There is no more opportunity in my area to speak English.

Mr. Nesbitt: I think the hon. member for Lapointe realizes that his arguments are not all that logical. Taking the total population of both Canada and the United States, English is the predominant language in commercial relations, and because of necessity, I realize, many people in Quebec have a greater opportunity to learn English than people in parts of Canada not adjacent to Quebec have to learn French. I do not think there is any argument about that. It is a fact of life. Maybe it should not be that way but it is a fact of life that exists whether one likes it or not.

There is a great deal of worry among many people that persons from parts of Canada not adjacent to Quebec may not have the opportunity to join the civil service in the future. If the policy in this regard were laid down clearly I think there would be a lot less worry and concern. There is not only