

*The Address—Mr. Francis*

who have examined the problem realize it is well worth Canada paying in order to provide effective measures of national unity.

More is being done today than at any other previous period since confederation toward making bilingualism a very effective and real objective. It seems a paradox to many English speaking persons that at the very time when most is being done, the complaints are the loudest. Complaints of discrimination and bad faith by the English speaking majority against the minority of French language and culture have formed part of nearly every speech I have listened to from the quasi separatist group on the other side of the house which calls itself the Ralliement Creditistes. They are not the only ones, however, who accuse the English speaking majority of discrimination and bad faith. Such accusations do not help the cause of national unity at this time.

As far as the public service is concerned, there is evidently a misunderstanding which is based upon the principle of the merit system. Prior to 1920, the public service of Canada was cursed with patronage and the Civil Service Act of 1920—and I am not one of those who claim there is any great virtue in any one party; I know it was a Conservative government which put that act on the statute books and I recognize it as a very good piece of legislation at that time—was the cornerstone on which the merit principle was based. The principle of selection and promotion according to merit has been the base on which Canada has developed a public service which I am proud to say is second to that of no other country in the world at the present time.

Only one legislative qualification to the merit principle has been enacted by parliament to date. This qualification relates to veterans preference. Veterans who suffered service-connected disability, were Canadian citizens and domiciled in Canada at the time of enlistment, or who served in overseas theatres of war are entitled to a preference in initial selection over candidates with superior technical qualifications. This preference is carefully spelled out by law, is restricted to initial appointment only and does not apply to promotional competitions. The justification for this preference is in terms of the sacrifice of personal careers and time and, in some cases, physical sacrifice on the part of those who served in the armed forces of Canada.

In recent months many of the staff associations have been asking the government of Canada whether the merit principle is still to be retained in relation to the employment and promotion of bilingual persons. It does

not help—as some persons have done, I regret to say—to say that in making these inquiries the associations are implying that a knowledge of two languages is not meritorious, or insulting those who speak French. Those who read such interpretations into the legitimate inquiries of staff associations do not serve the cause of national unity. I believe there are many measures which could be adopted which are perfectly consistent with the principles of merit and which will in fact provide the objectives which we in the public service all have in mind. I hope that on future occasions when private bills, to which matter I alluded earlier, are debated in this chamber we can amplify these measures.

The Prime Minister, in a statement before this house last week, made it abundantly clear that those civil servants who are unilingual and were unilingual at the time they were hired will suffer no impairment of their civil service careers on this account. The Prime Minister stressed, however, that efficiency and experience must be the overriding factors in advancement in the federal service, but added that in future bilingualism should become normal, because unilingualism will be the exception rather than the rule, and to this extent the third factor, bilingualism, would be considered at some point in the future.

My own view is that there will always be positions in the public service of Canada which will require basically a knowledge of the French language, and other positions which will require basically a knowledge of the English language. There will be other positions which should be substantially bilingual. Every department should be staffed in such a manner as to carry on competently its ordinary dealings with citizens of Canada in the language of their choice. In order to make this work, there is one serious defect in existing selective procedures. Language competency must be tested in a conscientious and objective fashion. At the present time an applicant may declare himself or herself to be bilingual in a competition, and the basis of testing of bilingualism is frequently haphazard. Knowledge of a second language should be tested by objective examinations of both a written and oral nature and each position in the civil service should specify the degree of achievement in a language which is called for. No policy of bilingualism can work in the public service if the methods of testing proficiency in languages are not completely objective according to uniform standards generally recognized. This is not now the case.