

*Supply—Secretary of State*

ference out of the civil service commission, the commission itself has as a result now become responsible to nobody. I know that in theory the civil service commission is responsible to parliament as a whole, but that is a rather nebulous status. In fact, the civil service commission like the C.B.C. has become a law unto itself, does what it likes and is probably the greatest example there is in Canada of the so-called establishment. Any time anybody makes recommendations in connection with the C.B.C. he is either brushed aside, as though no one is supposed to know anything about it except those who sit on the civil service commission, or else it is suggested that the proposals are some kind of political interference, no matter what they may be.

I think in most cases—and I want to make this perfectly clear before I continue further; the theory and principle behind the civil service commission is excellent—the commission generally speaking does a very good job and has done a very good job over the years; but like any other organization composed of human beings problems arise, errors are made and improvements are required. It is in this latter regard that I have a few suggestions I should like to make.

Regardless of where members of parliament sit in this house, they do from time to time receive letters from constituents who are applying for jobs and are asking for recommendations. A new member to this house very naïvely, and almost invariably writes a letter of recommendation and forwards it to the civil service commission. Members always receive very polite acknowledgments and an undertaking that the commission will keep the member informed as to what takes place. I must say at this time that the commission always keeps its word in this regard. It has been my experience, as I am sure it has been the experience of a good many members of parliament, that the longer one is here the more wary he becomes about writing letters of recommendation as to character and background on behalf of those individuals who make such a request, because it is my impression, and it may be an inaccurate one, that a letter from a member of parliament to the civil service commission in recommendation of an applicant is tantamount to the kiss of death. I have yet to hear of many individuals being successful in applications for a civil service job who have had the dubious advantage of letters of recommendation from members of parliament. Most of us in this house feel

[Mr. Nesbitt.]

we are second class citizens as far as making recommendations are concerned, even for the most trivial positions. Perhaps we are developing an inferiority complex in this regard. That certainly is the feeling one gets, and it becomes stronger the longer one is here.

Mr. Chairman, in the event the civil service commission officials are not aware of this fact, it is time they were told in plain language that regardless of where members sit in this house they have the feeling that their recommendations are unheeded. I have heard individuals state in private that if the civil service officials accept the recommendations of members of parliament they are allowing political patronage to creep into the system. While I realize that may be true, and that is something we do not want, I should like to make it quite clear that there is a more practical approach to this problem. In respect of positions which are of a strictly local nature, and perhaps I can use the position of postmaster in a rural or semi-rural community as an example, quite apart from certain qualifications required, there are other important characteristics, such as the ability to get along with the people of the community, record of honesty and the like, which can be assessed by the local member of parliament as well as or better than anyone else. Surely a member of parliament is qualified to know about these things, or in a position to find out about them. If a member of parliament makes a bad recommendation the electorate can rectify that error at the following election.

What actually happens in fact is that an individual from the establishment makes a trip to the village or the community and very often consults with people who are not in a position to know whether an applicant is qualified, and then sends in a report which as often as not is quite out of touch with the general feeling of the village or community in question. I think the civil service commission could perhaps make greater use of recommendations from members of the House of Commons in this regard, particularly when considering background, integrity and general ability of applicants.

An individual who is elected to this House of Commons surely has some status of responsibility in the community which he or she represents here, and in light of that fact I cannot understand the consistent attitude taken by the officials of the civil service commission at this time of ignoring recommenda-