

Supply—National Defence

What are the reasons for this deficiency? Is it because the authorities never cared to train French Canadian officers? Were our people given the same chance and opportunity of promotion to the rank of officers?

Military colleges were and still are English-speaking. Can anyone say that if French Canadians had had the opportunity of attending a French military school, they would not have succeeded brilliantly?

According to the minister, it would cost too much money. So there is no wish to spend money on teaching military science to French Canadians; but they are being called and enlisted as privates, and our students are being sent to Kingston. It is high time to change that sad state of affairs!

Has the Department of National Defence adopted any plan? How is the situation going to be corrected? If the minister knew—as he must have known—that most officers belonging to the headquarters of his department were English-speaking, why did he not correct this anomaly? Why did he even let it develop?

Posts of major generals, brigadiers, colonels and other officers that make up the establishment have been filled by English-speaking persons! This was not done overnight. Who is responsible for those appointments, who should take the blame for the situation if not the Minister of National Defence and the whole cabinet?

The Liberal party has managed the affairs of this country for fifteen years. For fifteen years it has prepared for war and waged war. The organization of defence and the selection of military personnel have been its work.

If today we have grievances and charges to make, they must be levelled at our present leaders. As a representative of a riding in Quebec province, I urge that the wrongs which have been done to my fellow citizens be righted and that those people's abilities be acknowledged in the armed services as well as in the civil service.

The time to act is now, not tomorrow. We are not asking for speeches and statements; we want prompt and efficient decisions that will do justice to those of our people who dedicate themselves to our country's defence.

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Mr. Claxton: Mr. Speaker, I have listened with sympathy to the representations made

[Mr. Gagnon.]

by the hon. member for Chicoutimi (Mr. Gagnon). If I said officers of French descent had not the required qualifications, that was not my intention at all. What I did mean to say was that we are short of officers of French descent. For instance, a lieutenant commander in the navy must necessarily have the age and experience required before he is promoted to the rank of admiral; that is obvious.

I have replied to the remarks made by the hon. member for Three Rivers (Mr. Balcer), as reported on page 2950 of the French debates, and I believe you will find there many reasons for the situation in which we have found ourselves.

We still want French-speaking officers. There is need for them in the navy, army and air force. There are many positions to be filled and the hon. member may be assured that French-speaking officers familiar with both tongues are always promoted. Indeed, they are promoted to higher ranks more often than the others, as was the case for brigadiers Allard and Bernatchez, whom I mentioned yesterday and who both are very distinguished officers. If there are others, I shall be very glad of it.

(Text):

Mr. Pearkes: Mr. Chairman, I understand that item 245 has been called, and that it is now the proposal to continue with the details as they are set out at page 269, the first group of which is under the heading of "Departmental administration, including inspection services and civil defence". I wonder if the minister who is now responsible for civil defence would now make a statement in this connection? I notice that the subject of civil defence is not separated as a separate detail under the group of details connected with departmental administration.

Mr. Claxton: The minister responsible for civil defence is here. He might make his statement either now or, alternatively, at the conclusion of the discussion on the other items, whichever is the more suitable to hon. members.

Mr. Pearkes: I suggest, if I may, that it be done now, if that is suitable to the minister.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, at the outset may I say that the report and statement I am about to make involve, in large measure, work that was done under the direction of my colleague the Minister of National Defence when this matter was under his jurisdiction and before the transfer of duties to the Department of National Health and Welfare.

The purpose of civil defence is to defend the population of Canada and the property of