

quire special lawyers for cases before the Railway Commission or in the Exchequer Court, we might as well do away with the salaries and expenses of the Solicitor General and his department? But what I wish particularly to call the attention of my hon. friend the Minister of Railways to is a matter to which I have already adverted some time ago this session and which the Minister of Railways promised to take into consideration. It is a matter of interest to us in the province of Quebec. While the secretary of the Board of Railway Commissioners is a very competent official, he does not understand French. A very considerable portion of the business of the board is transacted in the province of Quebec and a good deal of it in localities where the people are not as familiar with the English tongue as in the larger cities, and consequently, the necessity is frequently felt for a secretary who understands both languages. That has often been represented to my right hon. friend. I have not here the 'Hansard,' but when the board was constituted, reference was made—I think by myself—to the necessity of having a secretary who understood both languages, or at any rate a joint secretary who understood French. The expense of such a joint secretary is one which the House would be prepared to meet. The demand is a just one. I see that my hon. friend the Minister of Railways has a Bill dealing with the jurisdiction of the Board of Railway Commissioners. I do not know whether the question I am now raising could properly be raised in the discussion on that Bill; but in any event I may not be here when that Bill comes up for its second reading and it may not be proceeded with this session. Let me refer my hon. friend to section 22 of the Railway Act:

There should be a secretary of the board, to be appointed by the Governor General in Council, who should hold office during pleasure and reside in the city of Ottawa.

That clause should be supplemented by some such enactment as this:

If the secretary appointed be not versed in the French and English languages, the Governor in Council should appoint a joint secretary having a thorough knowledge of the language in which the secretary appointed is deficient. Such joint secretary shall hold office during pleasure and reside in the city of Ottawa. His duties should be determined by the board according to section 23 of the Act, and his salary shall be the same as that of the secretary.

Even should there be no opportunity this session to amend the law in that sense, I think the government would still have the necessary power to appoint an assistant for the time being and thus give that relief to people in the province of Quebec which has been claimed several times since the institution of the board.

Mr. MONK.

It is a reasonable request, it is a demand that seems to be necessitated by the fact that that tribunal has so much business to transact in Quebec. A great deal of that business is transacted by correspondence. Quite recently there was correspondence with the village of Côte des Neiges in connection with the Montreal Park and Island Railway. That correspondence had to be carried on in French. It was extremely delayed because the secretary of the board was not familiar with the language and a translator had to be resorted to. I myself had to translate at Côte des Neiges the communications coming from the board. Under all these circumstances the request I am making seems to me to be a reasonable one, and I would like to know whether the government have come to any conclusion in regard to the suggestion I made some time ago and which the minister promised to take into consideration?

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. The request of my hon. friend is certainly reasonable and nobody would find fault with it, but I do not believe it is necessary, to reach the object we have in mind, to amend in any way the Act now in force. I confess I am surprised when I hear there is no one connected with the board at the present time to do the French correspondence. I know that Mr. Cartwright, the secretary, who is certainly a very valuable and most competent officer, is perhaps not sufficiently conversant with the French language to carry on the correspondence, but I have been under the impression that Mr. Primeau, who is attached to the commissioners' office as registrar, had had attended to his office the duty of corresponding French secretary. I am under the same astonishment to hear now that those duties are not performed by anybody. My impression was, on the contrary, that whatever may have been the legal title of Mr. Primeau, part of his duty was to be corresponding French secretary. If that is not done, it ought to be done, and I hope the Minister of Railways will call attention to the fact.

Mr. MONK. I did not say there was no one on the board or on the staff who could undertake to answer the French correspondence.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. I thought you did.

Mr. MONK. What I said was that the secretary, who is a very competent officer and who gives great satisfaction, is not himself conversant with the French language. The other officer referred to is the accountant and registrar, and there is also one of the commissioners whose language is the French language. What I think we have a right to claim is that if the secretary himself is not fully conversant with the French language there should be a joint secretary who, as secretary, could