

Supply—Secretary of State

Mr. Lamontagne: The decision taken by the chief electoral officer recently was an ordinary administrative decision taken by him without any kind of instructions from the government. It was, I understand, a routine exercise.

Mr. Knowles: I was just about to say there was one question the answer to which might solve the problem we were discussing a moment ago. In view of the high regard we have for the work done for us by Mr. Nelson Castonguay and in view of the equally high regard we have for the work done for us previously by his father, Mr. Jules Castonguay, the question is: Are there any more Castonguays?

Mr. Leboe: I am interested in the question raised by the hon. member for Queens—what will happen to the work of the committee on privileges and elections? Will the work of the committee be finished, or will it be left in abeyance.

Mr. Lamontagne: We hope that the work of this committee can go on, perhaps before the end of this session, but certainly at the beginning of the next session, so as to enable the government to introduce changes and revisions in the act in 1965.

Mr. Knowles: When will the next session start?

Mr. Barnett: It seems to me that the hon. member for Oxford and the hon. member for Queens have put their questions to the Secretary of State the wrong way round. I should like to ask the Secretary of State whether he will confer with his colleagues and bring us an assurance that the work of the redistribution commissioner and of the commissions will be completed before we shall require the active services of a chief electoral officer.

Mr. Lamontagne: I am afraid I cannot answer that question.

Item agreed to.

Civil Service Commission—

1. Salaries and contingencies of the commission including compensation in accordance with the suggestion award plan of the public service of Canada \$5,516,500.

[Translation]

Mr. Pigeon: Mr. Chairman, I do not want to delay the passage of these estimates, but I wish to take this opportunity to make a few remarks concerning the civil service commission.

Could the minister tell us whether he intends to have the civil service act amended

[Mr. Macquarrie.]

during the course of this session or the next one to provide a bonus for any civil servant who is bilingual, in other words for those who speak French and English.

In my opinion, that would be a positive step since it would contribute to the spread of bilingualism within the federal civil service.

There are many disadvantages to the fact that a good many senior officials, in various services, are unilingual but that situation goes way back in the past.

I know it will be a tremendous job for the minister to remedy that situation.

When, for instance, a farmer from the province of Quebec wishes to approach the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Hays) or a departmental section chief who is unilingual, it is very difficult for him to obtain the information needed. That may be one of the reasons why agriculture in Quebec, more particularly, is in a state of inferiority; means of communication are lacking between the federal Department of Agriculture and the French speaking farmers in the province of Quebec.

Mr. Chairman, I feel that if the government granted a bonus to bilingual persons, at all levels of the federal administration in Ottawa the situation would improve. It is not a question of rushing things, of changing the policy overnight, but rather of implementing it gradually for those who are already bilingual and for those who are applying for civil service positions.

I also feel it to be important that all deputy ministers of the federal administration, in every department, should know both languages, in order to make their own contribution towards the improvement of the situation within the various departments.

May I point out that in many countries across the world, in foreign affairs, applicants are not only required to know the language of the country, but also to have some knowledge of French and English.

For instance, Mr. Chairman, in the United Kingdom applicants for a job in foreign affairs are required to learn another language, either French, German, Spanish, Italian or Russian.

The same situation applies to France, and also to Belgium, which is a bilingual country and where not only the knowledge of French and of another language is required, but also of English and Dutch. The Federal Republic of Germany also requires sufficient knowledge of English and French, apart from the official language of the country. The same situation exists in Holland and Austria.