

Supply—Post Office

all details that it is really superfluous for him to have in front of him the officials of the department. We have here a minister who really knows all the aspects of his department's operations and who is prepared to give them at the drop of the hat.

Being aware of this situation, being somewhat of a suspicious mind—I hope not in a bad sense—and having a few pipe lines, and by that I mean avenues of communication—to various parts of Ottawa, a couple of things have struck me in relation to this department. As I say, the minister is much more knowledgeable than the average minister about the operations of his department. Normally the estimates of the Post Office Department come in later in the year. This tends to be the pattern. I found out—and I could be corrected in this respect—that the deputy minister of this particular department, the civil servant in charge, seems to be due for retirement in May, 1961. These two pieces of information I began to put together with a little bit of questioning and a little bit of probing. I have a very hot tip, you might say, for the committee and it is to the effect that we may be able to look forward to having this extremely competent and knowledgeable minister of the crown as the next deputy minister in charge of the Post Office Department.

An hon. Member: That knocks you out.

Mr. Fisher: I am afraid I have not the knowledge of the Post Office Department which is possessed by the Postmaster General. It seems to me that this suggestion opens up all kinds of prospects. At by-elections the question will be asked whether it is a case of little furry animals deserting the ship and all that sort of thing. I hate to put it from that point of view, but I raise the spectre for the committee. Suppose—and I am not conceding it for a moment—that at the next election the Liberal party should win.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): They will win.

Mr. Fisher: Suppose they pick their shadow cabinet critic, the hon. member for St. Denis to become Postmaster General. I ask you to conceive of this situation.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Fisher: I ask you to conceive of the hon. member for St. Denis as Postmaster General and the present minister as deputy postmaster general. This leads me to present to the minister several questions. I should like to know whether it is true that we are to have at some time in the near future a replacement, because of retirement or other circumstances of the deputy minister in charge of the department. I should also like him to tell me whether this mastery he has gained

of the department is again going to be put to such use as I have indicated or, in other words, whether we can look forward to his being a senior civil servant.

I have not any criticism to present of this particular trend. I know there is some criticism of the other government to the effect that they used to take people out of the civil service and put them into the cabinet. I do not think it is such a bad thing.

Mr. Macdonnell: I always listen with interest to the hon. member. I have followed his remarks today, but up to the present time I have been unable to ascertain whether he is making a political speech or telling us a fairy tale. May we know which it is?

An hon. Member: It is the same thing.

Mr. Fisher: I cannot tell the hon. member whether it is a fairy tale. As a private member the hon. member knows how difficult it is for a private member to confirm all these things. However, I was trying to put together a few points that have come to my attention and, quite frankly, a rather hot tip. I thought this was the place, namely on the minister's estimates just before he makes a statement, to ask him whether he could enlighten us upon this possibility. As I say, I am not being political. I would not mind seeing the Postmaster General as the senior civil servant of the department. I do not know what are the views of other hon. members, but I am willing to admit that he is extremely knowledgeable about this department. However, there is raised, as I said, the issue of the hon. member for St. Denis vis-à-vis the deputy minister. It also raises the question of instead of elevating civil servants to the cabinet, making members of the cabinet civil servants. I believe this to a degree is a new trend, and I think we would welcome the minister's comments upon this particular point of view.

Mr. Hamilton (Notre Dame de Grace): I think perhaps at this time I should deal with some of the points raised in the last day and a half, and perhaps first and immediately with the fantasy which the hon. member for Port Arthur has built upon the one and only piece of information that is known or even under consideration, as far as I know, by anyone. I refer to the fact that the deputy minister reaches the normal age of retirement some time during this summer. The appointment of deputy ministers rests with the Prime Minister. Certainly if the hon. member calls that a hot tip, I call it rather cold information.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): May I ask the minister a question?

Mr. Hamilton (Notre Dame de Grace): Yes.