

Senate and House of Commons Act

Without this we will again find ourselves agonizing over similar legislation. No matter the outcome of this vote, I strongly urge that we attempt to solve this problem and that in doing so we make no distinction between the remuneration paid a member from one riding as opposed to that paid a member from another riding. The indemnity should be the same for all members. If an hon. member wishes to give large grants to charity, that is his affair. We each represent ridings which are equal in terms of this Parliament and in terms of the law. Therefore, I strongly urge that no attempt be made to change the situation.

Mr. Baldwin: Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether I might ask the hon. member a question. I was impressed by what he said and I have the same problem as he, but would he be more inclined to support this legislation if the government House leader were to indicate, when he winds up the debate, that it is the intention of the government to establish a committee charged with the responsibility of examining the question? Such committee could examine ways and means of dealing with the specific problems to which he has referred, such as arriving at some formula by which our increases are dealt with automatically from now on, and the question of expenses which has bothered a lot of members. If the government House leader would indicate that it is the intention of the government to refer the question to a committee, would the hon. member change his mind on this bill?

Mr. Peters: I should like to be able to say yes, Mr. Speaker.

An hon. Member: Don't waffle.

Mr. Peters: Waffles from all sides of the House come in different shapes and categories. I should like to say yes, but I do not believe that the minister will say that, because the matter has already been referred to a committee. I am sure that that committee will make some decisions in this regard. If the minister can give that categorical assurance, I would support the bill; but I do not believe the President of the Privy Council can do so, even though he might be willing to try. I will wait until third reading, which is acceptance of the bill, and if that kind of proposition is put forward I am sure a lot of other hon. members as well as I would be pleased to support the bill, though doubtless many others would not.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I recognize the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) I should advise the House that if the minister speaks now he will close the debate.

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I hope not to take too much time in making some comments and that I will maintain the generally moderate tone of the debate. I congratulate hon. members who have participated and who almost without exception have resisted partisan considerations when making clear their positions.

[Mr. Peters.]

● (9:20 p.m.)

Having listened to all the speeches, my impression has been reinforced that this is a very difficult issue. Almost every member who has spoken has had a somewhat different approach. While most members of the NDP who spoke were generally opposed to the bill, there was a very distinct difference of opinion within that party on certain details.

I begin by saying that foremost in the minds of most hon. members was the effect that the passing of this bill would have on the image and credibility of Parliament. That is a real concern, and it seems to me something ought to be said on the other side of the issue. It is true the image and credibility of Parliament will be judged in part by what we do on this issue, but it will also be judged by the people of Canada on what Parliament has done in this and previous sessions to assist broad classes of people in the country. It would be unfortunate if we supported the impression that no progress had been made in other fields during this session. We have dealt with old age pensioners—

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Forty-two cents' worth.

Mr. MacEachen: We have dealt with retired civil servants, we have dealt with retired CNR pensioners, we have dealt with adult members of the labour force, through unemployment insurance amendments and amendments to the Canada Labour (Standards) Code, and we have dealt with a major summer program for students, costing \$57 million, bearing in mind that the cost of this measure represents a small part of the total program for that group. We have on the order paper a number of measures dealing with assistance programs for the farmers in Canada. I make this point in order to clarify for my own benefit and for others that Parliament has been occupied all this session with issues affecting the people of Canada generally, and we have for these three short days been dealing with an issue that is very troublesome but does affect Members of Parliament.

The leader of the NDP, I am sure mistakenly and not deliberately, made a point in his speech which I should like to mention. It had been mentioned earlier that day in an editorial in one of the daily newspapers. It was to the effect that in making the last increase in 1963 it had been intended that the increase would take into account future years as well as past years. I have read the entire debate of 1963 and nowhere can I find any reference by any member of the House, let alone of the government, that the increase made in 1963 was to be projected into the future. In fact, the opposite case was made by the then Prime Minister, Mr. Pearson, who stated that the increase was large because the government and Parliament had failed to act for a long period of time, and because of the increase in the cost of living and the general cost increase. For those reasons the increase made in 1963 was very large.

Hon. members have said the timing of this measure is wrong. Of course it is wrong. There will never be a good time to increase the salaries and allowances of Members