

Members' Salaries

conflict of interest might seem to be present when the government was negotiating the level of salaries for its own employees.

There can be differences of opinion on the relative merits of flat expense allowances and accountable expenses. The government has not been able to satisfy itself that a system of accountable expenses would be preferable on grounds of principle, or that it would make any significant difference to the cost to the taxpayer. When my colleague, the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. MacEachen) introduced a measure some years ago to make a partial adjustment in conformity with the Beaupre commission recommendations, he dealt extensively with this particular problem. Hon. members who are interested in the discussion of principle may wish to look at what he said on that occasion. I recommend this course to hon. members.

It is significant that all provincial legislatures, and at least all municipal councils which I know, have flat allowances for their members which are also tax free. I think this fact illustrates the problem. It is difficult for those who are responsible to electors to be at the same time responsible to some civil servant by giving him some chit on which the expenses are indicated. Moreover, it is difficult, as anyone who has studied the problem will concede, to define what are the expenses involved when a member serves a constituency.

As to the level of allowances, this also is a matter of judgment and the government has accepted the recommendations of the group of private members for inclusion in the bill as being not unreasonable even after taking into account the services now supplied at public expense in the form, for example, of transportation and constituency offices. Should parliament approve the proposed increases in allowances—and I speak as a member of the Internal Economy Commission—it follows naturally that there would be less justification for improvements in the services otherwise provided to members of parliament at public expense.

● (1610)

I come next to the proposals for salaries of ministers and other members of parliament holding public office of one kind and another. Here the government has followed almost exactly the recommendations made four years ago by the Beaupre commission. The slight divergences from the Beaupre commission will be explained when the bill is in committee. I would remind the House that salaries of the prime minister and ministers have not been changed since 1954—20 years ago. The tax-free automobile allowance of \$2,000 per year now being paid to ministers and certain others is being withdrawn. It was, in fact, just part of the total remuneration and its withdrawal is therefore a significant offset to the increase in taxable salary of ministers.

Looking back, it is a pity that successive parliaments have been so reluctant to face up to the consequences of the growing demands placed upon members of parliament whether backbenchers, ministers, parliamentary secretaries, House leaders or opposition party leaders. We are still being paid as if being a member of parliament was a part-time occupation and did not interrupt the serious

[Mr. Sharp.]

business of making a living. As a result, the bill now before us comes as somewhat of a shock to the public and even to ourselves. It looks, superficially, as if we were giving ourselves big pay increases in excess of those taking place in other occupations.

I conclude by giving the House a couple of calculations. Let us assume that this parliament lasts four years. On that basis, the increase in remuneration for members of parliament between 1970 and 1978 would work out to an annual percentage increase of less than 6 per cent. Perhaps I might ask this question: What other bargaining group which has not had a pay increase for four years would accept the kind of increase we are proposing to be fixed for another four years?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Madam Speaker, I will be speaking at this time on behalf of our party in general and individual members of the party. I will make some comments on a variety of matters which have been raised by the government House leader. Let me say at once—this is something I have made quite clear to the government House leader—that officially our party does not oppose this bill, and I will be voting for it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baldwin: However, I must say that some members of our party are most concerned about parts of the bill. During the course of my remarks I will give some of the arguments both pro and con I have no hesitation in saying that people are genuinely concerned about this issue and it is always an emotional and difficult issue for members of parliament to express or to have someone express their points of view. Therefore, I admire them even though their points of view may not correspond with mine. However, I take very great exception to those who oppose for purposes of political motivation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baldwin: I am not levelling that charge at anyone. Let each person as he speaks, discusses and votes on this matter examine his own conscience. The reason for anyone voting for or against this bill is a matter between the member and his conscience. It is up to them why they do it. With regard to the issue which has been raised about this so-called committee, I do not think it is of any real importance. I preface my remarks by saying that as far as the House leaders are concerned, we were not involved. We knew from the very beginning the government was contemplating bringing in a measure to deal with salaries. But until I saw the bill, I did not know what amounts were involved. That is perfectly proper. I would not have sought that information nor would I have expected it to be brought to me. This government has a responsibility, as does every member of the House. The government must retain this information within the confines of cabinet until first reading of the bill in this House. No one should know—and I hope no one did know—the contents of the bill.

As I understand it, there were discussions from time to time. They were not official discussions. I say categorical-