

Senate and House of Commons Act

loss of motivation in even the most dedicated member. An increasing involvement of government in the lives of the citizens and the increasing awareness, sophistication and participation of the public in positive democratic government will require improved communications between the member and each segment of society. It is our belief that the individual member is the most important link in the communication chain that joins government to the public it serves. The committee visualizes the role of the member as becoming more onerous, more complicated, more responsible and more time consuming. Consequently, it will become increasingly important that provisions be made that will permit him to respond quickly and adequately to the requirements of the people.

Mr. Speaker, the bill we are now discussing does not provide for the services needed so that a member can better respond to these requirements.

In my colleagues' opinion and in my own, the most important recommendations of the Beaupré committee were related to the field of services.

The committee suggested that each member should have an assistant "to help him cope with his substantial and complex duties both in Ottawa and the constituency". The government is doing nothing of the sort. It has kept its former position on the committee's recommendation that members who so desire should be assisted in setting up a permanent office in their constituency.

Since I represent one of the largest constituencies in Canada, I believe I have reasons to require that some services be provided.

Last week, in support of his request, the hon. member for Lotbinière (Mr. Fortin) did compare the services he provides with those rendered by the representatives for the three provincial ridings that make up his own federal constituency.

In my case, comparisons may be made on the federal level since even if the constituency of Portneuf is not the largest in Canada, it is gradually becoming one of the most heavily populated; there are now 115,000 people living in Portneuf and this is more than Prince Edward Island which is served by four federal representatives.

Out of those 115,000 inhabitants, some 60,000 will be entitled to vote at the next election. This means that even if only one out of every thousand constituents wishes to see me, I have to meet 40 or 50 of them every weekend at my two offices located in different places in the constituency of Portneuf. And all this is in addition to the many letters addressed to me and the telephone messages my wife receives.

If a citizen of a 2,000 family locality writes to me, I just cannot say that is abusive. I cannot blame anyone for writing me, since I specifically ask people to get in touch with me whenever they feel it is necessary, whenever they feel I can be of use to them. Nevertheless, the fact that I have 115,000 constituents multiplies those requirements. As I say again, Portneuf is represented only by one member, whereas Prince Edward Island, with a smaller population, has four representatives.

I also want to discuss the \$6,000 now allowed for our expenses, tax-free. Under the present system, this allowance can be used either as such, or as a salary.

[Mr. Godin.]

Some members, whose expenses are minimal, have no need for such an allowance; it all depends on the territory to be served.

For instance, the Minister of Justice is really very lucky. He does not need his extra \$6,000 and I am truly glad for his sake.

● (4:30 p.m.)

But some need a much bigger allowance than others. It is another matter to which paragraph (b) of subclause (S) clause 44 offer a partial solution. In my view, the only possible solution to such a problem is to request vouchers for all expenses. In this way, members of Parliament would be treated on an equal footing and would no longer be penalized, instead of having this unfair system, and genuine expenses would be paid to each member.

Moreover, I object to the extension of this system with regard to the non taxable allowance. I believe that no member of Parliament has the right to have a different tax system than other Canadian taxpayers. The actual allowances are not imposed according to the taxation principles generally admitted in Canada.

I would like to see this procedure rejected immediately whereby members review themselves their salaries and expenses. Let us settle this problem. I think that it would be better to establish an independent commission which could evaluate and review the sessional allowance every two or five years.

However, it is true that, occasionally, we have to work 80 hours a week; but let us not think that we are the only group in society to make efforts.

In the riding of Portneuf as well as in others, but in Portneuf more particularly, where the footwear and slipper industry, for instance, has managed to hold its own in spite of the adverse effects of imports, it is not infrequent to find men who, in order to hold on, put in countless hours of overtime.

In several fields where salaries are not high, workers often have to hold two jobs in order to make both ends meet.

Among those who are also dedicated enough to put in long work weeks, are lumberjacks, farmers, in short, people from all classes of society.

This does not mean that they are the most highly paid. If, for instance, we compare the work of a mother who toils hard day in and day out without pay, with the achievements of successive CN presidents who earn \$75,000 a year and still show deficits, you will agree with me that a high salary does not mean competence.

It is evident that some members feel justified in receiving a more substantial allowance on the ground that it is hard for them to make both ends meet. But how many of their electors are not facing the same problem? How many Canadian industries can boast of an easy success? How many tradesmen are not facing financial problems at the present time? How many Canadians are subsisting on hope alone and are awaiting the effects of the just society?