

Income Tax Act

We all remember that the reform inspired by Bill C-259, passed on December 17, 1971, neglected some categories. In the bill before us, we find about the same faults. If the slogan of a just society has lost its value, it is simply because the Canadian government neglected to recognize some responsibilities, and I think that those who pay taxes should have the same privileges in return.

In 1971, I pointed out the advantages enjoyed by some professionals, namely lawyers, notaries, doctors and the members of any other profession who have a right to claim expenses incurred in the practice of their profession. Mr. Speaker, I not only agree but once again I congratulate all these people who succeeded in having laws passed which favour them.

But I think it is my duty to claim the same rights and the same privileges for other Canadian workers. Among these are construction workers, auto mechanics and forest workers. If often occurs that construction workers need tools worth \$1,000 and they must continuously replace these tools they cannot do without. The same thing applies to auto mechanics, except for the fact that the value of a tool chest can reach \$2,000. For them also there are new tools to get because of the changes in car models and because of wear and tear.

It is the same thing for wood cutters and forest workers who must part from their families for long weeks and who must support rather considerable travelling expenses in addition to their tool expenses. I believe it would also be in order that those workmen be allowed to deduct all such expenses from their taxable income, within certain limits, however, that is within a reasonable daily or weekly commuting distance.

Moreover, thousands of employees of the private or public transportation systems: railwaymen, bus drivers, truck drivers, have to take most of their meals outside their homes. It is only normal that a man should eat three times a day. So the government should allow, when determining the taxable income, such extra expenses to be taken into account in respect to various jobs.

Some tax rules recognize some expenses, but the implementation of those rules make me wonder. I hope I am mistaken, but I fear that the implementation of the Income Tax Act can vary between the year before a general election and the year after.

Let me quote before the House two documents concerning the meal expenses that truck drivers are trying to have allowed as deductions in the legislation. With leave of the House, I shall read a letter that was addressed to me by the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Gray), then Minister of National Revenue, on March 19, 1971. I quote:

Further to the questions you asked in the House on February 17 and March 4, 1971, I have to inform you that the department has not established new rules prohibiting deduction of the cost of one meal per day by the taxpayers.

In fact, following several complaints, similar to those expressed by your constituents, in the year 1969, the department has conducted a study on the matter of expenses incurred away from home which transportation and railway company employees throughout the country wish to claim as a deduction. This study showed that many of these claims were not supported by vouchers and that the department's policy was not consistent.

[Mr. Godin.]

It was found that those taxpayers find it hard to keep records and obtain vouchers to account for their meal expenses. Consequently, a policy was adopted under which workers in transportation and railway companies, when they could not produce vouchers, received an allowance based on the length of their stay away from their usual residence and on a reasonable amount for the cost of each meal. Moreover, the study we conducted as well as the discussions we had with officials of various trade unions have shown that an amount of \$1.75 for each meal was reasonable.

• (1240)

As a rule, when a taxpayer has to be away from his normal place of residence for a period of at least 10 hours, he is allowed to claim three meals at \$1.75 each, or a total of \$5.25.

I must point out that when a taxpayer produces the TL22 form, which is in fact a claim for expenses incurred away from home, as well as the vouchers for his meals on the road, he may be granted more than \$1.75, this amount having been set to check the claims from taxpayers without vouchers.

If you feel that some of your electors were not compensated according to the policy outlined above, please send me their names and addresses.

The letter ends with these words:

Sincerely yours.

And it is signed by the minister.

Last January I received another document from the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Stanbury) concerning the various claims of truck drivers. It contains the example of a taxpayer whose claim for 1970-71 was reduced from three to two meals a day. In the absence of a detailed report and of a statement of night trip expenses, this would seem to be fair.

In connection with another case, we can refer to information circular 71-30 which reads as follows:

—When a truck driver has the right to deduct meals, he must provide vouchers for claims over \$2.50. All meals claimed by this taxpayer were approved, but since he did not supply vouchers, his 1970 claims were reduced to \$2.50. His 1971 claim was reduced to two meals a day at \$2.50 a meal, in the absence of a detailed report and statement of night trips. This would seem fair.

Mr. Speaker, some senior civil servants informed me that the letter from the Minister of National Revenue dated 19 March 1971 contained a mistake.

The mistake was allowing \$5.25 a day for meals for a 200 pound truck driver who works 65 hours a week.

Apparently, the truth was to be found in the second document: two meals a day at \$1.25 each.

Mr. Speaker, truck drivers are not asking for their meals to be reimbursed. All they are asking is that their meal expenses be acknowledged and be made tax deductible. There is quite a difference. I am sorry to have to point this out, because I think that there are two sorts of ministers in the present government: there are the good guys, and the others. Personally, I like to think the hon. Minister of National Revenue belongs in the first group.

In view of the Department of National Revenue's large number of employees, the minister obviously cannot control all those public servants. There may be among them people who like to make trouble, over-eager people ready to defy regulations.

So, Mr. Speaker, public accounts have already revealed that the Canadian government was paying for \$65-a-day hotel rooms and \$12 meals for some CBC employees.