

Prime Minister's Residence Act

Kingsmere Park which is part of certain properties in the Gatineau Park bequeathed to the government of Canada by the Right Hon. William Lyon Mackenzie King as a public park in trust for the citizens of Canada. In May, 1961, Parliament enacted the Kingsmere Park Act to provide for the administration of this property in accordance with the will. The Act made provision whereby the Governor in Council may, by order, set aside any part of Kingsmere Park for use as a country home for the Prime Minister.

It has been the custom for a number of years for the Speaker of the House to occupy the building and the associated grounds known as The Farm on a rent-free basis. The government proposes, by this act, to give statutory recognition to a custom which, I am sure, reflects the high esteem in which all of us hold the office of the Speaker of the House. It is fitting that provision should be made in this legislation for this residence, along with those for the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. members will observe that, in addition to providing for the rent-free occupancy of the residences concerned, the bill stipulates that the benefits thereby received by the occupants shall be considered as a living expense allowance and, as such, exempted from income tax.

The present provisions affecting the Prime Minister's residence, as I mentioned, will continue in force until the next Parliament. What will happen now, if this bill is enacted, is that there will be an Official Residences Act providing for the arrangements I have mentioned relating to the residence of the Speaker of the House known as the Farm at Kingsmere, the residence of the Leader of the Opposition, Stornoway, and the residences of the Prime Minister at 24 Sussex Drive and Harrington Lake.

Mr. Heath Macquarrie (Hillsborough): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to be the spokesman for my party on this very important measure. I believe I was selected because I was considered to be the least likely person ever to occupy any of the residences under discussion at the present time. For that nomination, I return the thanks which are due from a modest man.

I am very happy that this is being done. There are other Beauré report recommendations which I would have greeted with some pleasure as well. I think it is important that all public men be accorded such dignity. I believe it is important that the nation show some respect in a permanent, and indeed practical way, for those who by the choice of their fellow countrymen or fellow parliamentarians in one case are elevated to positions of authority, respect and leadership.

It was an atrocious thing that this country for so many years had its Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition renting quarters or taking suites in hotels or what have you. The British have had No. 10 Downing Street and Chequers for as long as many of us can remember, and perhaps our parents before that. The United States has had its White House from the days of Jefferson, the first occupant. This is a demonstration that the office is

[Mr. MacEachen.]

indeed transcendent to the occupant. We never make a mistake, I think, in a country to emphasize the continuity of those institutions which make the country run and to which we pay allegiance. So, the democratically chosen chieftains of our land deserve the honour and respect which goes with the setting aside for them of official residences.

I would hope that as the years go by tradition will build into these residences and that they will become an essential part of the warp and woof of Canadian history as well as its greatness, its variety, its political structure and its variability mingled with its permanence.

The details set out by the minister have been set out well. He has been Gallic and sparse in his words, but I think adequate in his explanations. I do believe provision should be made for an official residence for the Leader of the Opposition. I am sorry that the original statement excluded any party but the Liberals and the Conservatives, but the realism was not unborne-out by the facts. However, it was a public spirited move on the part of those private citizens in Canada who acquired the fine residence, Stornoway, and although I might prefer the name ULVA House to Stornoway I agree with the minister that Stornoway is a pretty good name.

So, it is a very fine move which is being made. As a result, this matter will rest not with a group of public spirited citizens who from their own means provided a house for the Leader of the Opposition but with the state which recognizes the role of the Leader of the Opposition. In some ways this provision is one of the most important because it underlines the importance of the man who is the number one critic of those in power, and the number one contender for succession when the people's will is expressed in another way. Of all the variations of the democratic parliamentary system, I think the one whereby the Leader of the Opposition is made, in fact, an official part of the system is a fine move.

The changes involving the Prime Minister's residence are long overdue. We should have had them a long time ago. There are certain anomalies in reference thereto which have been discussed in this House before, such as the nonsensical requirement or tradition that the Prime Minister remit a certain amount of rent. This was based on the particular wish of a former occupant. It was a ridiculous thing which ought not to have recurred.

I think it would have been better had those charged with the responsibilities of discussing the fate of Stornoway given thought to the acquisition of other residences. I believe it would have been better had they been a little more historically minded. I advised the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Chretien) months and months ago that the beautiful residence of the former Prime Minister, Sir Robert Borden, was to be destroyed by some development group. It was mentioned time and time again, and I have a feeling that at the same time discussions were being held about Stornoway the wreckers hammer was being poised to destroy the beautiful home, Glensmere, in which Sir Robert Borden lived for a third of a century. He was a great Canadian, the architect of Canadian independence, our first and