

Senate and House of Commons Act

for a weekend I spend more money out of my own pocket than I do if I stay in Ottawa. I am sure that many members are faced with the same situation.

The Beauré committee proposed improvements in the telephone service available to members. It also proposed an allowance for telegrams. I agreed with the proposals for improvements in the telephone service. We already have a pretty good service, but it is just a matter of mechanics to improve it further in terms of the member's needs. I question the allowance for telegrams. I note that reference to it has crept into the legislation now before us. I think it is a very questionable type of extension of services to members.

It is also proposed that mail addressed to or from Members of Parliament anywhere in Canada be sent postage free rather than only mail to or from the House of Commons. I also have reservations with regard to this proposal. As it stands, I cannot concur with it. From reading the legislation I gather it is to pave the way to implementing this proposal. I submit the proposal will be subject to much abuse. It is not the type of service which is most essential for a Member of Parliament. This type of service is very much needed in respect of correspondence mailed to and from the House of Commons, but I question whether it should be made available to members anywhere in Canada.

The Beauré committee proposed that improvements should be made in office space available to members in Ottawa and in secretarial and other assistance for members. I find these proposals useful and satisfactory. It was also proposed that provision be made to assist with office facilities for members in their constituencies. This proposal should have been given more consideration by the government before making its decision. It should have been a top priority matter in terms of any changes which the government proposed. At the present time I have an office in Regina which I operate jointly with my colleague, the hon. member for Regina-Lake Centre (Mr. Benjamin), together with our constituency organizations and some of the interested organizations in that city.

• (3:50 p.m.)

My hon. friend from Regina-Lake Centre and myself contribute to the upkeep of this office out of our own pockets, out of our indemnity and expense allowance. We felt this would enable us to provide the useful and necessary service which members should provide to their constituents. Assistance in this respect would be warranted and acceptable. The Beauré committee also recommended that improvements be made in office space available to members in Ottawa and that other assistance should be provided. This we certainly agree with.

A number of other proposals were put forward with respect to giving a housing allowance to members while they were in Ottawa, to do away with the \$6,000 tax-free allowance, to raise the indemnity to \$23,000 and, later, to \$25,000. Then a range of increases was proposed for the Prime Minister, members of the cabinet and certain other members in addition to their usual indemnities. It is obvious that this set of proposals has been rejected by the government.

I agreed with the proposal to do away with the present tax-free allowance. It is one of the things to which people really object with respect to the remuneration of Members of Parliament. The proposal now put forward will be subject to just as much criticism as was the old allowance. An increase in the indemnity to \$23,000 a year without any tax-free portion would have resulted in very little by way of a real increase in indemnity for members since the entire sum would be subject to income tax. Of course, this has now gone by the board. A case could have been made for a reasonable increase in indemnity but I do not think the proposal now before us is at all acceptable. I do not think it is the type of proposal the people of Canada will find acceptable no matter the merits it may have with respect to the particular situation in which some members find themselves.

I am bound to look at this question as the member for Regina East, as the member who was elected to represent some 90,000 people in the Regina East constituency and make decisions in this chamber on their behalf to the best of my ability. I am bound to keep in mind who these people are and the manner in which I relate to them. Many of my constituents are farmers. They have experienced very difficult economic circumstances over the past several years. They have also felt the brunt of government policies which have restricted their income and their income potential.

In the city of Regina many workers are earning only a very modest wage. Others are unemployed, unable to find work though they have been looking for it for months without success. Part of their difficulty in finding employment arises from decisions taken by the government. Some of these decisions came to the floor of the House of Commons. People will resent the fact that Members of Parliament suddenly find it possible to take speedy action to deal with their own particular needs.

In Regina East there are many who live on comparatively low wages. For a variety of reasons they were unable to gain anything by way of an improved education; for one reason or another they were unable to learn skills which would place them in a high-income category. They, too, have gone through a difficult time over the past few years. Along with others in Canada they have been asked to hold the line with respect to wage increases, in order to help fight inflation. Some of them who were least able to afford it were asked to bear more than their share of the burden of fighting the battle against inflation.

As in other constituencies throughout Canada, there are many old age pensioners in Regina East. Most of them live on fixed incomes. They went through the First World War and the Second World War with a depression sandwiched in between. The majority retired before the introduction of widespread pension plans and income security plans for the aged. At the present time their standard of living is minimal. There are also people in my constituency who are earning a comparatively high income. Some of them are in receipt of incomes far in excess of my salary as a Member of Parliament. They have been doing very well in many respects. Of course, they are part of the total population of the constituency. I