

The Address—Miss Bégin

representation of the people, so that this job may be really open to men and women who are willing and able to serve their fellow citizens and their country, even if they are not rich and are unable to face very high election costs and so that they may not only enter politics but do their job in a serious and sincere way.

It is a common saying in the general public that the member of parliament is some kind of person of standing who is entitled to mysterious privileges, in short, a person of standing who does not work very much and has an easy life. This I say without any resentment, but I think it is important to say here, sixteen months after my election, that this idyllic description has nothing to do with reality, at least for the great number of members I got to know and who have become colleagues and friends of mine.

In our Parliament, a session now lasts 10 or 11 months of the year, five days a week and three entire evenings, besides the tiring hours of work in committees of the House, including hearings held across the country. Added to that the usual work of a member of Parliament on behalf of his constituents and of those who request his help. Such work is a daily task which knows no rest during weekends. I am not mentioning here the caucus meetings, the representation duties, etc.

Last year, at this time, I was directly in charge of the interests of about 150,000 citizens. In one year, this number has been increased by 25,000. Did anyone ever ask what were the working tools of the federal member of Parliament in order to serve his constituents? After a month in office, I was astounded at the telephone bill that was awaiting me! And yet, all these long distance calls were about my work as a newly elected member of Parliament, due to problems brought to my attention by my constituents. A few months earlier, I was one of the 400,000 public servants, a specialist "at the service of the people". Today, I am on the other side of the fence, if I may say so, one of the 264 "general practitioners at the service of the same people". Before, I had at my disposal all the basic tools required. Long distance business calls anywhere in Canada or outside the country were paid of course by the government; any document could be duplicated in record time; travelling expenses and allowances in this country or sometimes even outside the country raised no problem. Green boards, charts, newspaper or magazine subscriptions; telegrams, books, briefcases, overtime staff, translations, were of course available as required. I did not have to pay for my French-English dictionaries, nor for any office equipment—Of course, we had air conditioning; anyway, we were on leave in summertime—

It is certainly not fashionable to try and foster pity for the M.P.'s. However I would like to correct the descriptions of the mass media on this question erroneous as they were, but not malicious I hope. On top of a fixed annual salary and an annual allowance for extra personal expenses caused by a second home and its attendant expenses, allowance which must also cover other expenses of all sorts, the federal M.P. does not receive any other allowance. It should be mentioned that his official mail, as that of all Canadians writing him, is postage free.

Last June, he found himself allowed, for the first time, to use a telephone credit card inside his constituency, and this applies only to the 156 non-urban constituencies in

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Canada, and between his constituency and government offices in Ottawa. All other long-distance calls require by our trade are charged to us. And since Christmas this year, thanks to the good offices to the Speaker who, as of January 15, 1974, promulgated standing orders to this effect, each of the 264 federal M.P.'s can open an office to serve his constituents: lease, furniture, maintenance, telephone, taxes, etc., are payed directly to the suppliers by the House of Commons up to a total of \$200 a month. The required secretary or secretaries are hired by the House of Commons of Canada at a salary or salaries not exceeding \$6,000 per constituency.

The amount of work required from a federal M.P. in his electoral riding is great, considering the increasing complexity of the government apparatus, the different jurisdictions and the constantly increasing number of programs directly aimed at the population.

● (1710)

We are often contacted not only for information—a service which should be normally provided by Information Canada—but also for assistance in drafting community projects, not to mention the great many individual applications for assistance of various types. Actually we are eager to maintain a regular liaison with various groups. I should like to mention that since it takes three elected members to the provincial legislature to carry out similar duties in my own riding, my burden must be three times as heavy as theirs.

It is therefore unacceptable to hear on a CBC news broadcast the following statement:

Mr. Drudy earmarked a reserve of \$924,000 . . .

—as though in the age of Louis XIV—

. . . to help elected members maintain an office in their respective ridings, amount which equally shared among the 264 members, would provide every one of them with an additional income of \$700 a month, tax-free, of course.

An editorial such as the one published in the November 12, 1973 issue of the *Globe and Mail* is equally unacceptable. The only purpose is merely to provide each hon. member with a small measure of the resources he needs to serve his constituents.

Before going on to something else, Mr. Speaker, I should like to thank you for having considered recommending that at the opening of the first session of a new parliament, the government refer the regulations concerning these constituency offices to the House Committee on Procedure and Organization for study and recommendations.

This four-party committee, open to the public, will have an opportunity to study the various methods that the members from all parts of the country have tried in order to serve their constituents as well as possible. They will then truly answer for them to Parliament, as they have already answered for them to the public.

I have taken nearly half of the time allotted to me on this single question, Mr. Speaker, because I believe in my duties as member of Parliament and I am well aware that the Canadian people would like to believe more in those who represent them. They want representatives who can do their work with all the ability and means required to