

Senate and House of Commons Act

do, we would accept it, the public would accept it and it would be a lot easier. We had the independent examination by the committee and we did not have—I do not know what to call it—the courage to go all that way and decided to give, on the salary side, a little better than half what the independent body said we were worth. That is what is before the House on the salary side, and members are not satisfied. Members still ask for an independent body. It would not help us to have an independent body make recommendations in the future, because we would still have our own misgivings. The only way that would work—and I refer to the comments of the former leader of the NDP, the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands (Mr. Douglas)—would be not only to give that independent body the right to examine but also the right to fix the rates. That is the only way it could be taken out of Parliament.

But having made the canvass of members themselves, having had the Beaupré report tell us what we ought to get, and having had consultations in our own caucus and with all the opposition parties, we finally came forward with what we thought was probably the best and most acceptable arrangement considering the diversity of views which exist. Everybody has a different idea about what should be done. Some say the raise is all right but the expense allowance is wrong. Some say the raise is fine but it should come after the next election. Somebody must take the responsibility. The government did take the responsibility and placed the bill before the House, and the House now must take its responsibility and accept it or reject it. That is the way our system works.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: We have had a very good debate. I believe any person who wishes to read the debate will find that every point of view has been canvassed. I am sure that nothing I say will convince hon. members who have made up their minds to go a certain way. I am satisfied nothing I say will change their point of view. That is fine, but I believe it is important to have all points of view on the record.

I wish to conclude by referring to comments made by a number of members, the most recent of which is a comment by the hon. member for Timiskaming. He wondered why we did not provide a formula for the future. It is not that we did not think of it or consider it; it is simply that we did not have the conviction that we could devise a formula that would fit the situation. Is Parliament ready to give an independent body the right, not only to consider what the remuneration should be but also the right to fix the rates in the same way we have given the Representation Commissioner and his group the right to fix electoral boundaries? Many Members of Parliament would say we went too far in giving that right to an independent tribunal. Do we want to do that?

We considered the idea put forward by the leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Lewis) which was supported by others and which has a certain value, namely, that we tie our rates in the future to an appropriate public service category or to a range of categories. We were on the verge of accepting that idea. Why did we not

[Mr. MacEachen.]

accept it? The government at some point is obliged to set rates for the public service. It might be better to attach these rates to the bargaining groups, but at some point the Treasury Board, the representatives of the government, must agree on what the final bargain is to be. That is understood. We wondered whether there would be a ground for criticism to the effect that the government, in setting the rates or in agreeing to certain rates might have had in the back of its mind a way of increasing the rates for Members of Parliament.

● (9:40 p.m.)

Mr. Lewis: Not even your government would do that.

Mr. MacEachen: Perhaps we have been much too punctilious and much too perfectionist—

Mr. Peters: Could I ask the minister a question?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member may ask a question if the minister is in agreement.

Mr. MacEachen: I want to complete my remarks. I will answer the hon. member's question later. I want to say that we are still interested in this proposal, and if in the committee members generally feel that this is a common ground by which we can set rates in the future for allowances and expenses, we will honestly search for that solution.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: If members generally feel that tying it up with some appropriate category—I do not know what it will be—that will be generally accepted is the right way to proceed, then we will search honestly for that solution, because we have not ruled it out and I told hon. members quite frankly why we did not put it in the bill. I think it would be much better to have it come this way than through a government recommendation before the debate commenced.

I have nothing to add to what I have said, except to refer to the comments I made on the non-accountable, tax-free allowance. That has been subject to considerable discussion. I will not repeat the arguments I made. I said when I introduced the bill that it was an arguable point and we decided to move in the direction we did on the basis of the argumentation which I gave in introducing the bill and which I will not repeat at this time. So we are not rushing this bill forward. If it goes to the committee following the vote, the committee can examine the details of the bill, and certainly, speaking on behalf of the government, let me say that we are ready to search honestly for a future formula.

Mr. Peters: May I now ask the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) a question? In referring to bargaining in the public service he indicated that bringing in bargaining units from outside would have some effect on that bargaining unit. Was he referring to the fact that if there were any serious difficulty in those negotiations, Members of Parliament might line up on the side of the civil servants for strike action?