

Senate and House of Commons Act

tremendously. Nowadays a member gets more work and has more issues to deal with in his office than ever before, partly because of the economic situation and partly because Canadians across Canada are far more aware of their Member of Parliament and are in touch with him far more often than in the past. When I was first elected, parliament sat for about seven months of the year. Now, it is sitting nearly full time; it was suggested today we would be here all the summer and this may be the case. So, there is no question in my mind that the workload has increased, the length of sittings has increased and, surprising as it may seem, the insecurity of tenure of office has really increased because people are changing their minds to a far greater degree today as to which candidate they will vote for or which political party they will vote for than ever before.

As the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) stated, to run for office takes considerable moral courage. There is no question in my mind that this statement was very correct. But I still go back to the fact that it is a matter of timing. I think it is regrettable that the government should have decided to propose such a large pay raise at a time when the economic situation in Canada is not good, when many people are unemployed. Certainly many people are working and enjoying a fair standard of living in a high-cost economy, the same economy as that in which Members of Parliament must live. I expect, though, that Members of Parliament meet many expenses which would be hard to justify for tax purposes, but all the same there has been money allowed tax-free to cover those expenses.

Many changes could be made with regard to the working conditions of Members of Parliament which would not create a great deal of expense. To my mind, the telephone arrangements for Members of Parliament are very poor. When one is at home in the riding, a member cannot telephone Ottawa without going about it in what always has appeared to me to be an underhanded manner. He phones his office with some kind of signal, the secretary calls him back and he then talks at government expense rather than his own. This, to me, is wrong. If a member has free service from Ottawa he should have free telephone service throughout his riding. This would be particularly advantageous in creating the same operating expenses for rural members as for city members. A city member can operate on the basis of a monthly charge for his telephone; it costs him very little more because he can speak to every one of his constituents in the city without incurring long distance charges. A member representing a rural riding finds that most of his constituents can only be reached by long-distance telephone calls; he does not enjoy the same conditions as his counterpart in the city does. He has to pay for them. Some changes along these lines would have been better brought in at this time, rather than the method the government has chosen to assist Members of Parliament in serving their constituents. I will follow the discussion in committee on this piece of legislation with continuing interest.

Mr. Paul St. Pierre (Coast Chilcotin): It took quite a bit of political courage to bring in this legislation, but it does

[Mr. Horner.]

not take a great deal of political courage to speak against it because it is always all too easy to be on the side of the angels. I hope what I am going to say today I can say briefly and quickly. I shall not cast any reflection on other members of the House for the way they, personally, grappled with this problem, as I am presently grappling with it and have been for a considerable time.

I am afraid that this Parliament and Parliaments before it have failed abysmally in dealing with this question of how members' salaries, allowances and services should be adjusted. It is a degrading process for us that we must be placed in a position of deciding our own levels of salaries and our own levels of services.

I think we have also failed badly in explaining to the Canadian people that the Parliament of today is no longer a comfortable club to which the country squires used to retire for conversation in the season between the fall harvest and the spring planting. Parliament now sits 10 or 11 months very frequently and has precious little holiday in the remainder. There may be some legislatures where the old view of the country squires' parliament persists. Without calling them country squires, I should point out that in my own Province of British Columbia the legislature convenes for only 9 or 10 weeks in the winter months. But our time is long. We are engaged in a fulltime occupation here and I think we have failed individually and collectively to get that message across to the Canadian people.

An hon. Member: The press has failed.

Mr. St. Pierre: My hon. friend says the press has failed and I would agree with him.

In my observation, conscientious parliamentarians here work atrocious hours under considerable stress much of the time and with shockingly bad facilities. In my own rather short career I have not encountered anywhere else an aggregation of men who, by and large, had any higher ideals or ideas or personal dedication to their work. As for some of the prosperous publicists of the radio and some other communications media who are now delighting themselves by blackguarding this institution and the people who serve in it, I have nothing for them but contempt.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

• (12:20 p.m.)

Mr. St. Pierre: They can take their money and sleep with it in their beds at night. I do not know whether I have accomplished much here. Sometimes I think I have accomplished a little, at other times I do not. But I do know the effort that I put out and my conscience will let me sleep. I look around this House and everywhere I see members who I know put out great effort and great dedication.

To the extent that this bill improves our facilities and relieves us of some of our expenses, I strongly support it. I think the increase in the tax free allowance is justified; I shall take it and use it gladly. Like other hon. members of the House I have learned that to be in Parliament can be a costly business. Like many others, I have had to dip