

Senate and House of Commons Act

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, it is always a very delicate thing for an individual to have to discuss a problem in which he is directly involved, as is the case with Bill C-242 dealing with allowances paid to members of Parliament. However, I feel it is my duty to take part in this debate and give my opinion as briefly as possible on the substance of this bill.

This afternoon I listened with great interest to the speech made by the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen). I was very attentive in trying to understand every word of his remarks, and I must congratulate him for the fairness with which he expounded and defended the bill he sponsored. I feel that he stated clearly what is the real role of a member of Parliament and how this role must in fact be conceived even among the population. But, I will say this: Unfortunately, the function of the member of Parliament is sometimes despised by the people—

Mr. Côté (Longueuil): You do not mean that.

Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse): The minister in charge of the Post Office (Mr. Côté) says that I do not mean this. It is because he knows that I mean every word that he tells me this, by the way. I know that he is a friend and that he is saying this to tease me. At any rate he recognizes that I am a serious man.

In Quebec, when the Committee on the Constitution was holding meetings on April 19, only eight days ago, I found that French Canadians, some of our own people unfortunately were scornful of the representatives of the people.

It was useless to protest since they had already made up their mind. For them, all members of Parliament are to be despised because they are not exactly aware of their real function and of the way they are performing it.

In the past, unfortunately, some members may have failed to do a good job. But this does not mean that such failure is now general. As for myself, since I have been sitting in the House, I had the honour of meeting every member for whom I have much respect. I think their functions are really honourable. In fact, a citizen who has the good fortune of filling such a post should consider himself appreciated by his fellow men and must, in return, give the best of himself by trying to honestly represent his electors.

Mr. Speaker, I also consider that the remarks made today by my colleague from Lotbinière (Mr. Fortin) were honest. And when we hear sometimes—and I know that it is neither serious nor sincere—some hon. members voicing that the Créditistes lack sincerity or that they are hypocritical, I think they speak beyond their minds. In my opinion, it is only a way of saying that we do not share the same views. I excuse them heartily, and I am convinced that, as early as tomorrow, they will be ready to tell people: These people have the courage of their convictions and say what is on their minds.

Some may say also—or at least they may think—these are members who seem ready to refuse a salary increase.

[Mr. Gauthier.]

I am not against it because we don't need it; we do, it is obvious! Nobody turns down a raise. Sometimes people will ask us the following question: If the bill is passed as it will necessarily be because the government has the majority, will you refuse what is offered to you? No, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, when I vote against taxes increases and when the bill is passed by the majority, I have to pay these taxes as a responsible citizen. The same will happen for this bill respecting increased parliamentary indemnities; and I shall go along with the law and accept the decision of the majority.

There, Mr. Speaker, you have a frank and honest opinion of the role assigned to me and of the situation as I see it.

Mr. Speaker, on February 5, 1970, the government appointed a commission to consider the matter of parliamentary allowances and expenses. The members of Parliament were invited to state their views in this regard. That is exactly what I did. I submitted a brief. So you see, this opinion of mine is not something that I made up tonight.

One only has to refer to the notes of the Breaupré Commission to see that the member for Bellechasse did answer the invitation extended by the Commission.

In the brief I submitted on May 19, 1970, I humbly stated my opinion in answer to the Commission's invitation to make our views known to them.

And this is what I said:

First, since the last readjustment of electoral boundaries, rural constituencies have been enlarged, and as a result a member has to incur heavy car expenses to travel within his constituency and maintain contact with the people.

Second, the constituency of Bellechasse, which includes almost three provincial counties, and which was represented up to June 25, 1968 by three federal members, is now represented by one member only, which has tripled the workload of maintaining contact with the people, travel and other expenses with respect to various organizations and citizen groups, as well as contributions of all sorts.

Mr. Speaker, may I call it ten o'clock?

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[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Baldwin: Mr. Speaker, may I ask the President of the Privy Council, as government House leader, if by any miracle members should become shy and tongue-tied on this sensitive matter tomorrow, what we will be doing afterwards?

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, we will continue with the present item, the amendment to the Senate and House of Commons Act, followed by the bill to amend the Prime Minister's Residence Act, followed by the bill to amend the Prairie Grain Advance Payments Act, the bill to amend the Canadian Wheat Board Act and the bill to amend the Post Office Act.