

Senate and House of Commons Act

do so. We have led the way. We now ask that the government accept our position as a principle to be applied to all hon. members. A member should not work occasionally, as some would have it, but full time. That is what the people require from us.

Likewise, the population, and justly so, is against our giving ourselves a special treatment as opposed to other citizens. The Beaupré report suggested a maximum expense account with a voucher system, according to the actual amount of expenses incurred.

Mr. Speaker, the present proposal of the Prime Minister and of the President of the Privy Council does not take this recommendation into consideration. We grant \$8,000 to every hon. member. It is for them to decide if they will spend \$3,000, \$4,000, \$5,000, \$8,000 or more.

Mr. Speaker, that system is not acceptable. It is like building on shifting sand. It is not in this way that we shall enhance the value of our parliamentary and democratic institutions and of the function of the member of Parliament. Let us remember this: the hon. member who decides against opening an office or making regular trips to his riding will be able to put \$8,000 in his pocket without having to account for it to anyone. Who would ask for an accounting? And at any rate, if there is an election, the party funds will be used to help him and he will be re-elected, and the people will know nothing of this.

But the hon. member who understands his function, who decides to give proper service to the people, will spend the \$8,000; that is what we are doing. The latter will be penalized while the former will benefit.

It is impossible to apply the same yardstick to all members whether they come from western, eastern or central Canada. Their working conditions are not the same, nor are distances they have to travel. To be just, the system must take this into account. Otherwise, we will be compelled to think that expenses are used as an excuse to increase salaries, all the more so as expenses will not be taxable.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize that a member's work entails a great deal of expenses, but the government should realize that they are not the same for all members. Besides, they recognize this principle in the bill by saying that the members from the North will have to incur more expenses than the others.

If the government acknowledges this principle for a certain group of members—and we commend them for it—let them extend it also to all members.

Mr. Speaker, I would have some important questions to put, to which it is urgent to have some answers.

First, what are the responsibilities of a member of Parliament, and to what extent are they likely to change in the years to come?

Another question which should be answered is the following: How does a member view his function and how does the public see it? My colleagues and myself have been wondering about it for a long time. We did something to get an answer. Several of my colleagues and myself sent more than 10,000 questionnaires to each of

our ridings asking people of all classes of society poor and rich alike, how they viewed the role and duties of their federal representative whatever his political party, in the riding as well as in Ottawa.

● (8:40 p.m.)

The people of my riding and elsewhere were not afraid to answer. The population considers the member of Parliament as a public servant. The position we take today is largely based on the results of this comprehensive poll.

It is obviously difficult to answer and solve those questions perhaps simply because the role of the member of Parliament is mostly what he makes it, according to his own concept of it, his competence and dedication. Mr. Speaker, the Canadian people expect no less from us.

For the benefit of my colleagues, I should like to tell them what questions we put to the people, when we asked whether or not they agreed with the definition of the duties of a member of Parliament. This is what we put to them, solely to give rise to a dialogue in the riding:

1. To be aware of and interested in the problems of all the citizens.
2. To participate actively in the economic development of his area.
3. To fight against the injustices that victimize some citizens.
4. To work steadfastly to achieve security for all.
5. To protect the freedom and the rights of each individual.

—whether his pockets are well-lined or not.

6. To be always available.

—to the population.

7. To consult frequently with all classes of society in order to express the opinions of constituents.

When we proposed to the electors this definition of the work of the member of Parliament in his constituency, people gave an almost unanimous response. Consequently, Mr. Speaker, we have no other choice today but to urge the government to give the population permanent secretarial services in the constituency in order to keep the people in touch with this extremely important institution which Parliament is.

Insofar as Ottawa is concerned, we have proposed the following definition to the people so that they may comment on it, criticize it or make suggestions:

1. To sit in the House of Commons on behalf of all the people in the constituency, not only on behalf of his—

—supporters.

That is another point, Mr. Speaker, which is most important.

2. To advocate or support all policies favourable to the people as a whole—

—in his constituency.

3. To protest strongly and freely against the measures contrary to the best interests of the citizens in his constituency.

Finally, still in Parliament—

4. To try to build a great country meeting the wishes of the people in his constituency and his province—

[Mr. Fortin.]