

House of Commons Act

of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Chrétien) is a resident of Ottawa but comes from St. Maurice, the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) comes from Montreal, and the Solicitor General (Mr. McIlraith) comes from Ottawa. I am having particular difficulty convincing these commissioners of the validity of certain claims I make respecting travelling privileges extending to members who live in western Canada. Frankly, I am convinced that the ministers on this committee, living as they do either here or in central Canada, do not have not a clue about the particular circumstances that apply to members who live far from Ottawa.

There is also the question of telephone calls that are made outside one's constituency and not on the dial system. I do not know whether it is Treasury Board niggardliness or because they want to draw the line somewhere; but if one dares to make a telephone call outside one's constituency and not through a dial exchange, just try and collect. For some reason Treasury Board and the commissioners only recognize telephone calls to one's constituency. This is all very nice for the commissioners who have no problems with their wide-area dialing, but I wish they had to deal with the situation to which I have referred.

There is also the question of travel from airports. Take a member who has to travel through four or five other constituencies in a city, say for 20 miles, from the airport. If the airport bears the same name as that hon. member's constituency, no allowance is made. In Edmonton, the taxi fare from the airport to my constituency is \$9. The constituency in which the airport is located does not bear the same name as the airport; yet a member who does not have to travel as far as I do between the airport and his home is entitled to be reimbursed his expenses. I wish the commissioners would come down to earth and consider some of these problems. Another difficulty lies in holding meetings of the commissioners. I do not think there is anything harder to do on Parliament Hill than to bring the four ministers from their cabinet posts to a meeting with Mr. Speaker.

As I have said, I have considerable sympathy for changing the composition of the committee. We could change the designation of the committee without even changing the act. The government should recognize that this committee is responsible to the House. Since it is not a government committee, it should not consist only of cabinet members. That recognition, I suggest, would make a big improvement.

[Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West).]

I cannot go along with the hon. member's desire to repeal section 18 of the Senate and House of Commons Act. If that were so, then frankly no money would be paid to and on behalf of this House. After all, it is Parliament that authorizes the payment of money, not the House of Commons. Under no circumstances can the House of Commons authorize the payment of one penny. Therefore, I think the complete suppression of section 18 would operate to block payment of any moneys to the House of Commons.

A number of other matters were also discussed. I do not think that the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization can examine the status of members' salaries. The salaries are set by statute and this is a statutory item which is beyond—other than the subject of comment—any control by members of that committee.

I will leave the question of negotiated settlements, the organization of employees of this House in a way similar to that of other branches of the public service, and so on and so forth, until another time. There are many, many hooks there, as far as I can see; for example, if Mr. Speaker, decided on a Wednesday afternoon that there would be an extra sitting on the Wednesday night, and immediately the equivalent of the shop stewards started to negotiate whether this constituted extra overtime, was beyond the limits of overtime, and so on. There are other ways than that to achieve justice. This House and its deliberations should not be bound by the narrow limits of a negotiated agreement of that kind. Going from the sublime to the ridiculous, I suppose if we wanted to we members could organize ourselves into a union and occasionally go on strike.

Mr. Howard (Skeena): We might stay out.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): There are proposals in this bill that might be referred to committee. I observe the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Blair) in the chamber, and I know that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), like myself, is a member of the committee. I might do what Mr. Speaker does, if I may say so with great respect. At times it seems, with respect, if Mr. Speaker, finds a particular problem confronting him, he has a little slot on his chair—next to where Your Honour's hand is now—and it is marked "Committee on Procedure and Organization". This is a slot through which are dropped "hot potatoes".