

Income Tax Act

The writer of this letter is the Rev. R. S. K. Seeley, who is the Provost and Vice-Chancellor of Trinity College, Toronto. His letter to the Prime Minister is dated June 19, 1956 and it reads as follows:

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

It has been brought to my attention that legislation is being introduced to reverse the decision of the Department of National Revenue that professors of theological colleges have the same status as the parochial clergy in that they are entitled to exemption from income tax on the rent which they pay for their houses and living accommodation.

As president of the conference of heads of Anglican theological colleges in Canada, I respectfully request that this legislation be not introduced, since it would bring about an injustice to a group of people, small in numbers but of great importance to the community.

Theological professors are in a peculiar position among the clergy. While they in general receive a slightly higher cash salary than most of the parochial clergy, they do not receive free living accommodation nor do they receive the revenue from fees and Christmas offerings which almost all parochial clergy enjoy. Their actual or real salary, therefore, is usually lower than what they would be receiving in parochial work. They have far heavier expenses in the purchase of books, and recent legislation has removed the privilege of obtaining income tax exemption through the contractual expenditure plan. Moreover, they are frequently engaged in work of a parochial nature for which they seldom receive remuneration or travelling expenses. It is also true to say that their houses and quarters are in frequent use for pastoral care of the students whom they teach.

I am sure you must also be aware that the proposed legislation would engender disharmony among the churches, since it would discriminate against those churches which permit the marriage of the clergy.

While I am writing primarily as the representative of the Anglican theological colleges, I know that I can say that such legislation will be looked upon with great disfavour by the Anglican house of bishops and by the authorities of other denominations.

I am convinced that the government of Canada regards the clergy as a body of men who, in the discharge of their vocation, contribute inestimably to the well-being of our country and, since their financial rewards are so scanty, they are deserving of such consideration in the tax field as can be given to them. I know also that you personally and your government are concerned about the plight of our institutions of higher education. Among such institutions our theological colleges can least afford to pay adequate salaries. Such small relief, therefore, as the present exemption provides means a very great deal to those who are responsible for the spiritual leaders of the future.

I am confident that, when these facts are considered, the government will deem it wise to suppress the proposed legislation in the interests of the public good, and I respectfully request that careful consideration be given to this matter and to the distress which such legislation would bring.

I remain,

Yours sincerely,

R. S. K. Seeley,
Provost.

Mr. Chairman, it seems to me that that is a fair and comprehensive presentation of the case of the clergy engaged on the teaching

[Mr. Fleming.]

staffs of the theological colleges of this country for the same kind of consideration as this bill has proposed to give to the parochial clergy and as the minister's amendment proposes to enlarge so that clergy engaged on the administrative staffs of religious orders or religious denominations may also enjoy it.

The enlargement I propose would not cost the treasury of this country very much. Unless some provision of the kind I have suggested is made, I think we are going to be legislating to create a discrimination. I do not believe that is the wish of members of this house. The importance of the clergy engaged on the teaching staffs of the theological colleges I am sure is not underestimated by any hon. member in this house. I make this plea in all earnestness now for that group of men who, if they are not included in the benefits of the section, I think will be entitled to feel that they have been discriminated against.

Mr. Michener: I should like to endorse what has been said by the hon. member for Eglinton. The amendment appears to have been the result of a decision within the department which was perhaps not in accordance with the government's view of the meaning of the section. For that reason and for the reasons which have been advanced, it seems to me that there is no sound distinction between a man engaged entirely in related work in an administrative capacity and one who is teaching theology exclusively. If the minister would accept that viewpoint and add to his proposed amendment the words "in teaching theology" so that the amendment would read as follows:

. . . or engaged exclusively in teaching theology or in full-time administrative service by appointment . . .

and so on, it would cover the point which we wish to make. It seems to me to be a matter of simple justice to a small number of men who are equally devoted in a full-time capacity to the same causes which occupy the time of those who are parochial or administrative officers in the churches. I would urge the minister, even at this point, to reconsider the amendment which he has made. It does not affect many people, but it is an important matter for those it does affect in the everyday considerations of their inadequate financial remunerations in that high calling.

Mr. Harris: Mr. Chairman, I think if I was to judge the Income Tax Act solely on my own sentiment I would be obliged to accept the arguments that have been advanced. But when my hon. friend says there is no sound