

Senate and House of Commons Act

better to serve the public. The need for such services is repeatedly stressed in the Beaupré report.

• (4:00 p.m.)

The \$8,000 so recommended can be used by the member for accommodation in Ottawa, for a certain amount of travel including travel in his constituency, accommodation away from home and facilities in his constituency for keeping the member in closer contact with the electors of his riding. We are, therefore, recommending non-accountable expenses of \$8,000 following the policy and tradition of this parliament since 1945. It will be recalled that the tax free allowance was introduced, I believe, in 1945 "for expenses incidental to the discharge of his duties as a member". In successive revisions since that time the principle of the allowance has been preserved, relating directly to the discharge of duties encountered by a Member of Parliament in his role as a Member of Parliament. I want to emphasize, with regard to the provision of facilities for constituency purposes, that the allowance is intended to enable the member to provide those facilities which in his own judgment are best suited to the needs of his particular constituency and in the way in which he can best use that sum of money to serve his constituents.

The elected member should have the authority and responsibility, in our view, to apply the allowance in a manner appropriate to his own particular situation. The Member of Parliament is continuously accountable, it seems to me, in a much more meaningful and relevant way to his fellow members of the House of Commons, to public opinion, and to the electorate. He will be required to give an accounting, and is giving an accounting, for all his activities to all these observing groups at all times. Surely, they will observe also and take him to account for the way in which he deals with the responsibility that he has now.

The considerations which the Beaupré committee used in reaching their conclusions on services are found on page 39 of the report. I will not repeat them here, but these were the considerations that led the committee to conclude that the welfare of Parliament demanded an increase in facilities and a substantial increase in salaries. We have differed somewhat in method from the recommendation of the Beaupré committee, but our approach favours the same goal. I have stated already the reasons which led us to reach this conclusion.

I want to make one point, and I think it is important to make it, that if you examine the Beaupré report and you make a list of those items of expense for which the Beaupré committee said members should be reimbursed, and if you put a figure on these, which is not hard to do, you will find that the total of these recommended expenses which should be met out of the public purse will, according to Beaupré, reach at least \$8,000. The hon. member for Malpeque (Mr. MacLean) said that his total was in excess of \$8,000. The expenses which Beaupré said should be reimbursable on voucher will at least reach \$8,000 in my view, and I agree with the hon. member for Malpeque that it exceeds \$8,000. So, we are really attempting to implement the facilities proposals of

[Mr. MacEachen.]

Beaupré. All we differ in is the method, whether it be by submission of vouchers or through a fixed sum, with the responsibility in the hands of the member. That is the difference in method, and I believe there can be valid differences of opinion on that approach. The cabinet has certainly given very careful consideration to this matter and has concluded that it would be more in accord with the position of Members of Parliament to maintain this tax free allowance non-accountable.

My colleagues will recall that this was a very important point of argument, and the conclusion was reached on the basis of principle that we ought to maintain this, not because of any personal status which we want to confer on ourselves individually, or because of any personal glorification. We will pass out of here in due course, perhaps some of us quicker than we would like, but other Members of Parliament will come in to perform that office. We think this type of method is more in keeping with the traditional role of a Member of Parliament.

Today we had a question of privilege. It was on the grounds that Members of Parliament had a right to visit penal institutions. Presumably because the job demanded a particular independence that no other citizen required, Mr. Speaker made clear that Members of Parliament enjoy certain privileges under act of parliament which no other citizen enjoys. We can say what we please in this House within our rules. Why have we been given this special privilege? It has been given so Members of Parliament, as representatives of the people, will be able to speak freely without fear or favour.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: They will have the independence to say what they think is necessary without fear of reprisal of any kind. If a member exceeds the bounds of good conduct, the House will discipline that member, but it is a special privilege.

Mr. Lewis: For which we should get paid?

Mr. MacEachen: What I am arguing is—and I believe the hon. member will follow the argument if he does not agree with it—that Members of Parliament have certain privileges that no other citizen has in order to maintain their independence. That is the point. There are precedents. This situation was not created by this government or by this Parliament. It was created a long time ago. The Senate and House of Commons Act says that Members of Parliament shall have immunities, privileges and powers equivalent to those powers and privileges enjoyed by members of the British parliament. These continue for reasons that I have stated.

It may not be a great point, but I think the point is worth making, that we should preserve the independence of Members of Parliament and their status by not equating them to other civil servants who have to submit their accounts for minute examination. That is the only point that I am making. You can disagree with it or not, but I thought I should explain to the House that this is the reason that we have adopted this approach.