

Senate and House of Commons Act

to bring up again the arguments for or against the bill brought forward since the beginning of the debate. But I would like to expose my own points of view on some specific clauses.

To my mind, this is not time to suggest increased allowances and expenditures when the economy of the country is stagnating, when a large number of Canadians are up against problems of unemployment and spiralling prices. Underemployment and increased prices are the direct or indirect result of lack of action and the maladministration of the government.

In private industry, when bad management or economic conditions do not allow for dividends, they are simply forgotten. And I think that that is the position which we should take under the circumstances.

I do not mean to say that parliamentarians are the only ones responsible for the present situation. Certain officials should also take the blame for a good part of the disappointments of this administration. They would benefit from soul-searching, if they can do it.

Certain information media should also examine themselves on the nature of the information which they convey to the public whom it is their mission to inform.

The Beauré committee report mentions the working facilities which should be available to members of Parliament so that they can adequately discharge their responsibilities. Here is an excerpt from this report:

The Committee is satisfied that important improvements must be made in the facilities provided to Members and in the methods of financing them. The need to make these improvements is urgent and it will become more urgent and more serious as the importance of the role of the individual Member in the parliamentary system continues to expand.

The Parliament member should at least have the same facilities as those available to civil servants. How many civil servants would accept to share an office with two or three people? Very few, I think.

I also feel that the member should have secretarial services available to him in his constituency so that he can meet his constituents and provide the population which he represents the services expected of him. I believe that such facilities should be substituted for increases.

Another matter which we cannot discuss in this House and which is the target of bitter criticism on the part of the population concerns the Senate.

I have a lot of respect for the members of this institution. I am aware of the services which they have rendered to this country, over the past century.

The remarks that I have to make about the Senate are specifically directed to the institution itself. Since it is a century old, it needs rejuvenating. I would go further: a great many Canadians are even questioning the need for it. I believe I am reflecting the opinion of a majority of Canadians when I say that the role of the Senate must be reevaluated and that we should, if required, do away with it.

Without being in complete agreement with the figures proposed in the Beauré Committee report, I should like to state clearly that I agree with the basic principles

[Mr. Rodrigue.]

stated in the report, concerning the methods to be used for the payment of salaries and allowances to members of Parliament and senators.

In my opinion, the salaries of members of Parliament should be taxable on the same basis as those of all other Canadian taxpayers. Let me be more precise. Presently, a member receives a taxable salary of \$12,000 and a tax-free allowance of \$6,000 for his expenses.

The tax-free allowance should be abolished. Expenses inherent in the functions of member of Parliament and senator should be reimbursed on the same basis as those of public service employees, and according to practices prevailing in private industry.

On the matter of expenses, the Beauré Committee simply recommends the reimbursement of expenses related to the function of member of the House of Commons or senator. This can be implemented in two different ways: either by providing directly to members of Parliament services for which they now pay out of their salaries and allowances, or by reimbursing expenses on the production of vouchers.

The fixed allowance now in existence and which the government intends to maintain in effect is not in line with recognized taxation principles in Canada. Furthermore, the fixed amount of the tax-free allowance is not logical because of the disparities due to the various distances to be covered in the different constituencies.

The expenses of a member residing in the national capital area or in any other easily accessible centre are certainly not comparable to those of a member residing hundreds of miles from the country's capital. In addition, distances within certain constituencies are another factor to be taken into consideration.

This bill in my opinion, is tantamount to extraordinary legislation which is no longer justifiable. During the last general election campaign, was it not the Liberal party, now in power, that had among other items of its platform the establishment of a just society, the suppression of privileges and the adoption of legislation fair to everyone?

We all deplore the fact that the public tends to consider as salary the fixed allowance for expenditures really incurred by the Member of Parliament in the discharge of his duties. In this respect the position of the Member of Parliament does not differ from that of any other taxpayer. The system proposed by the Beauré Committee is more equitable than the present one and would also be more easily understood by Canadians.

We have the opportunity to correct this extraordinary situation which is not justified.

We intend to modernize Parliament and the administration. The opportunity is there to correct this situation by rejecting this extraordinary legislation.

If we continue to follow this practice, we let the people suppose that the tax-free allowance is only a disguised way to round off the indemnity paid to parliamentarians, while this is not the case.

There should also be provided a term for the periodical adjustment of parliamentary allowances as is customary in the public service. In this way, it would not be neces-