

REMUNERATION OF PARLIAMENTARIANS

Members of this Honourable House will be aware that there has been a recurring problem over the years concerning the appropriate levels at which to fix the remuneration of Parliamentarians including the Ministers of Government.

In 1976, I referred this problem to a Committee headed by the Honourable Leslie Ashenheim, O.J. Recommendations were made, and in due course, implemented.

In 1981, the incoming Government faced the same problem and acted in similar fashion by establishing a Committee headed by Mr. Ranold Sasso, Banking Executive, to review these emoluments.

His Committee also made recommendations in due course. However, in addition to specific proposals concerning emoluments, they recommended that a Permanent Independent Committee should be appointed and charged with the task of reviewing these emoluments from time to time.

The Government implemented the recommendations of the Sasso Committee with respect to salaries on a phased basis. However, they did not act on the proposal to establish a Permanent Independent Committee.

In the meantime, the question of integrity of Parliamentarians including issues of possible conflict of interest has also been the source of public concern.

In an attempt to address the issue of integrity, the Government introduced legislation in 1973, which required Members of Parliament to file annual returns on their incomes and holdings with an independent body of Commissioners. This legislation has prove to be largely ineffective with many Members of Parliament ignoring, and even sometimes defying the provisions.

The only sanction to which they are subject is the embarrassment caused by the public disclosure of their identity. Experience has shown, however, that this is not a deterrent in a number of cases.

In 1987, there was concern arising from the construction of a tourist facility in Ocho Rios. Here, the public disquiet was directed at the question of conflict of interest. As a result, the Prime Minister established a Committee to examine

the problem under the chairmanship of the Honourable Glen Owen.

On the death of the Chairman, the Honourable Dr. Aaron Matalon, O.J. was appointed Chairman and the Report of this Committee was tabled in the House of Representatives on July 4, 1988.

This report correctly drew attention to the connection between the level of Parliamentary salaries, possible conflict of interest and concern for integrity.

It is clearly in the national interest that some means be found to reconcile these various considerations.

Obviously, Parliamentary salaries must reflect the considerable responsibilities attached to the various levels of service in the political directorate. These salaries should also bear some relationship to levels of remuneration in the Civil Service, the para-statal organisations and the private sector. Furthermore, they must encourage the participation of men and women of talent yet they must not affront the value of society.

In addition, they must enable the Parliamentarians to discharge their responsibilities in reasonable security, while being mindful of the income levels of the majority of the population and the financial constraints within which the country is obliged to operate. Those who hold political office must however, enjoy the confidence of the community in their integrity, and provide by their conduct the assurance that they take decisions with the national interest uppermost in their minds.

In the light of all these considerations, the Government will re-convene a bi-partisan Committee of Parliament and charged its members to look at the considerations which led the Ashenheim and Sasso Committees to their conclusions. The Committee will also examine the arguments and recommendations of the more recent Matalon Committee. In addition, they will be asked to examine the effectiveness of the Integrity legislation of 1973, and to consider amendments which can put teeth into the legislation, give authority to the Integrity Commissioners and serve as an effective deterrent to Parliamentarians who are indifferent to the requirements of the present Integrity Act. The Committee will also make recommendations on the permanent integrity machinery which needs to be established to deal with Parliamentary salaries on an ongoing basis.

Members of all three Committees - the Ashenheim, Sasso and Matalon Committees - will be invited to hold discussions with the bi-partisan Committee which will

make its recommendations at the earliest possible date and certainly within six months.

It should be noted that it has become the practice to link the salary of a Minister to that of a Permanent Secretary and it is this which led to the recent speculation that Ministers were planning salary increases based on proposed increases to Permanent Secretaries as part of the Administrative Reform Programme.

However, despite the present practice, and regardless of any action taken under the Administrative Reform Programme in the current financial year, it has been decided that members of the Cabinet will receive no increases on their salaries this year.

Two overdue adjustments will nevertheless be made. Firstly, there is the problem of Members of Parliament, Ministers of State and Parliamentary Secretaries whose adjustments fell behind those of Cabinet Members over the years. It is necessary to correct this anomaly and restore the salary relationships between these groups.

Secondly, Cabinet Ministers, Ministers of State and Parliamentary Secretaries are eligible for fully furnished residences. However, the Government is short of adequate housing to fulfil this obligation, and hence, only some of them are in fact provided with these residences.

To ensure that the accommodation requirements of fully furnished housing for these politicians are met, it is proposed that the Government rent houses up to a maximum approved rate to meet this shortfall in official accommodation.

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PRIME MINISTER  
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