

Members' Salaries

[Translation]

Order, please. I would remind the hon. member for Longueuil (Mr. Olivier) that, pursuant to Standing Order 45, all motions shall be in writing.

[English]

Mr. Leggatt: Madam Speaker, my position on significant pay increases for members of parliament, a position which I have put forward on previous occasions, in the present parliament, both inside and outside this House, is that a significant increase in the salary and allowance paid to members of parliament is long overdue and well justified. In saying that, however, I disagree most vigorously with the hon. member for Longueuil (Mr. Olivier) who challenged the honesty of a certain member of this chamber. Let me say that no member of this chamber is more honest and sincere than the hon. member for Winipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles).

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Leggatt: His views, which do not correspond to mine on this issue, are sincerely and honestly held, and the suggestion, in any way, shape or form, that his position is hypocritical, is most improper. His position is not hypocritical. I happen to disagree with him, but on good socialist grounds. Nevertheless, his opinions are honestly held.

Paying the members of this chamber properly and adequately is the government's responsibility. It has failed to discharge it. It is not good enough to say that we can resolve this question with ad hoc consultations carried on behind curtains, and then make this decision. The responsibility lies with the treasury benches of this House, and that responsibility has never been properly shouldered in terms of providing proper and adequate pay for the members of this House.

There is always a wrong time to bring this question forward; God knows, the government could not have picked a worse time than Christmas for bringing forward the initial bill. Its actions almost defy belief. Nevertheless, this debate has been useful and my party's position has been useful, because it has allowed us to explore the subject and debate the issue in this House. I think that is good. I repeat the position I have made known inside and outside the House. The significant pay increase is well merited and long overdue. I understand that my party will propose amendments in committee which will suggest appropriate levels of remuneration, considering our present inflation.

I object to being told that the salary of a member of this House is \$18,000, plus \$8,000, or a total of \$26,000. That is nonsense. I receive a salary of \$18,000, period.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Leggatt: Let us be perfectly clear. If a member does not spend his tax-free allowance for purposes for which it is intended, he should refund it to the treasury. If we had heeded the Beaupré commission's recommendations on providing vouchers for our expenses and on how our salaries should be determined, we should not now need to go through the present unnecessary and abrasive debate.

[The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Morin).]

You know, one cannot include a member's tax-free allowance as part of one's income. A member is not like a commission salesman, who can add his tax-free allowance to his other pay and classify it all as income. We make \$18,000 per year, and raising our pay to \$24,000 is long overdue. There is nothing improper in paying a member of parliament of this country \$24,000 a year. Such a salary is appropriate, even in socialist terms. The socialist democratic parties of Europe were the first to provide substantial pay increases for members of parliament, so that being a member would no longer be a silver spoon job. It would no longer be a job for those with an independent income who could come to parliament when it suited them, and at other times play the part of the squire of the village. Such people held their seat in parliament with little effort. That sort of system is not democratic, and is not consistent with socialism.

We want a system in which all kinds of men can become members of parliament. It is the member's job to provide leadership, and his salary should be commensurate with his responsibilities. Unless we pay members adequately, we shall not evolve an egalitarian system. It has been said that members should not be the highest paid people in this country. I agree. Surely the figures which have been quoted show that the proposed increase for members is reasonable. We are not trying to make great jumps in the amount of salary we receive. And we do not support the philosophy of silver spoon members of parliament. For that reason we want members of parliament to be paid properly and adequately.

There is no point in comparing members' incomes with the incomes of members of professions, or of members of trade unions. The fact is that everybody else's grass always looks greener. It is natural for members of the public to think that members' salaries are being increased to high levels. It is natural for people to say, "That sounds like a lot of money." But consider the member's responsibilities and the time he spends on the job. If we convert to an hourly rate, at \$24,000 we are probably being underpaid. However, by accepting \$24,000, I think we do display leadership to the community in terms of the inflationary problems that we now face.

● (2140)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Leggatt: I think the position taken by the NDP has been useful. It has kept a full debate going in terms of this most important issue. We have seen changes up to this point from the original proposal of 50 per cent, the same 50 per cent that was recommended in 1971.

People sometimes forget that in 1971 this parliament voted for a 50 per cent increase, raising the previous allowance by 50 per cent. The proposal that again came forward at 50 per cent had a pretty good precedent. That is exactly what was voted for and passed by parliament in 1971. Nevertheless it is important that we have a full debate now.

I am hopeful that in committee there will be useful amendments. Frankly, I cannot quite understand why we should tie the allowance, if we are going to get it, to the industrial composite. Surely it should be a cost of living