

Senate and House of Commons Act

those who are listening to my words, because I think there is a general disposition to have the measure move on to committee where there can be a more detailed study made of all the points that have been raised by various members. I do not intend to wallow in any swamp of double talk or preach any platitudes from the plateau of purity. I think that this forum is the mirror of Canada's mosaic. I think this forum personifies the Canadian personality. It is the closest thing we have to a vehicle which represents all shapes and sizes of opinion in this country.

● (2:10 p.m.)

That being so, hon. members are duty bound—no matter how painful it may be to any who are in debt, and there are not many members here who do not have overdrafts in the bank, myself included—to be realistic. They ought to know that although the public is never well disposed to salary increases, salary increases of this substantial size will be looked on with disfavour and will bring on a delayed action, regardless of what editorials say. An increase of this size will bring about an alienation and lack of respect for this institution which I do not think this institution can afford. In this day of dissent where our youth are quizzical, to say the least, and perhaps even critical, we must remember that if we pass this measure we will not enhance the stature of this institution.

I do not think any hon. member pretends to have a monopoly on conscience. Certainly, no one member and no one party has a monopoly on conscience here. I believe that this institution represents the collective conscience of Canadians and that is why we must consider carefully how we move in adjusting salaries and expense allowances. In my opinion by trying to move the way we are, we are ignoring the realities of life. I am sure that if the doctors, lawyers, dentists, unions, teachers, secretaries or any other group tried in one fell swoop to increase their salary position by 50 per cent, this chamber would order an investigation. The Prices and Incomes Commission would undoubtedly move, too, even if the salary scale of the particular group in question were lower than that of other groups. The fact this matter falls too close to home is no reason for us to ignore reaction in the country. I believe that the relevance and credibility of this institution is at stake.

The question of the credibility of this institution has probably bothered me more than any other single thing. It almost seems that the more controversial the issue or the more sensitive the subject, the more mute and mild does the chamber become. It seems that the old mores and taboos do not apply anymore. I think that the public, which is more in tune with what we are doing than ever before through the medium of television, is in a better position to assess the performances of members than ever before. Paradoxically, while the public is more in tune, I believe it is "turned off" when we play the charades of yesterday. I, personally, believe that hon. members individually and parties collectively must start taking stands on these matters, sometimes for the wrong reason, rather than adopting the sterility of no stand at

[Mr. Nowlan.]

all. When we pass a bill such as this we shall compromise ourselves on any future stand we may take respecting economic conditions in this country, and for that reason I believe the credibility of this institution is at stake. How, after passing a bill like this, can hon. members talk about discipline, controls if necessary, and the necessity of battling the fires of inflation in future? If I were to talk that way, I am afraid I might be laughed off the platform.

I feel that a salary adjustment is necessary. I feel that an increase in the expense allowance is necessary. Nevertheless, when I came here in 1968 I knew what my salary was to be. I cannot accept the reasoning to the effect that if we get this increase it will represent an annual increment of 6 per cent from 1963. Let me remind hon. members that there have been two elections since 1963. The problem with the expense allowance and the salary is this: we are not looking at any regular procedure. The sums involved are not tied to any cost of living allowance or to ministerial salaries, nor are they determined by any tribunal which might review this matter. Personally, I do not know that I want members' salaries tied to the salaries of deputy ministers, important though they are, or to a level very much below theirs. The bill seeks to increase salaries by 50 per cent merely because we have postponed, time after time, the perennial problem of members' salary increases. That problem has been in a sensitive area. When I was elected here I knew full well what my salary was to be, so I do not think it is honest to increase it by 50 per cent in mid-term. I do not think I can defend that. Hon. members may say that it is easy for me to say these things and that I am on the side of the angels. I have felt it my duty to make perfectly clear what I feel.

Some members have suggested that we ought to remedy poverty before we increase our salaries. If we are first to rid this land of poverty, then I suggest that every member in this institution will be part of the dust of the land before there is any adjustment. I am glad that this is a matter for individuals to decide. It should not be, and I hope will not become, a party matter. Because this is a matter for individuals, I have debated with myself whether I ought to move an amendment to the bill. My position, briefly, is this: I have no objection to the expense allowance being increased. My personal expenses in my constituency are far greater than \$8,000. Yet I question the substantial size of the increase at this time. In principle, I agree that an adjustment is necessary and for that reason will vote for the measure on second reading. The motion before us is to refer this bill to committee. However, unless there is an amendment in the committee which will postpone the implementation of the salary increase until after the next election—and I may try to move such an amendment in committee—I will be prepared to vote against the measure on third reading.

Any member who dares to involve himself in this debate can be accused of many things. My position is perfectly clear. To me, the only thing more odious than preaching a double standard is accepting a double standard. I do not believe that this substantial salary increase is justified at this time. Some say that if the bill is passed