

Senate and House of Commons Act

Mr. Hogarth: And you will tell them you voted against it.

Mr. Peters: I intend to vote against it, against the system. Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for New Westminster (Mr. Hogarth) has arrived very late. I have gone over this before. I assure him that if he can change the system, if he will arrange for our salaries to be linked with those of civil servants on whose behalf bargaining takes place, I will support the bill on third reading no matter what the conditions are. I went through this once before. I told my constituents: That is the amount of money which will be paid. I voted for it and all you have to do now is indicate who you think is going to earn that money for the riding. And that is the way it will be after the vote is taken.

For some time now our interests have been diversified. Many of us are in the House less often than we used to be. We attend committee meetings and take part in the work of Parliament in other ways. But listening to many debates recently, especially about nine o'clock at night, I have noticed there has only been about one person in the press gallery. Tonight there are quite a number of people in the press gallery.

Mr. Gleave: Probably they ran out of booze.

Mr. Peters: I shall not make a pitch to the press gallery, but one of the difficulties about deciding the pay of parliamentarians is that we must do it in a fishbowl while great agonizing goes on in the news media. This matter will be discussed for years. It is only recently that I have gone back to earning \$12,000 a year; for a long time it was \$18,000 a year. Now, to make the increase appear larger, it is \$12,000. When the members of the Ontario legislature got as much as they did, I was surprised to find there was very little said about it in the press. But when we get any concession there is a great deal of coverage, most of it adverse.

There are other questions which must be answered before the question is settled. One is the idea of making crooks out of Members of Parliament simply because the commissioners of internal economy reached a decision regarding the interpretation of one word in an act which was already on the statute books. When a member of Parliament is out of Ottawa he telephones his office, asks for himself, and his secretary says that he is not there. When Bell Telephone makes the connection with the member's office they are given the number from which he is calling, the office then phones that number back and as a result the call costs nothing.

• (9:10 p.m.)

We are proposing to pay Members of Parliament \$26,000 indemnity and expenses, but surely to God we can make honest men of them! It is rather like the prostitute who wants her customer to pay for the bed; it is a small consideration. But after all, if I get \$26,000, why steal nickels from Bell Telephone?

An hon. Member: What do you want, double the amount?

Mr. Peters: I am sure every member does. If not, he must be nuts. After all, Bell Telephone pays the bill and we have not yet nationalized that company.

There are other considerations. Many of my colleagues have referred to improved accommodation, and I think there is a great deal to be said in support of that argument. But I am going to oppose this bill just the same. If there is no real issue for the next election campaign, someone will make an issue of our pay increase and some members will be defeated because of it. In 1963 only ten of my colleagues voted against similar legislation, as did the former Leader of the Opposition—and only three of those ten are still in the House, the right hon. member being one of them. So I do not have much sympathy—I say this sincerely—for those who oppose this legislation on the ground that they will run into problems in the next election campaign.

There is no doubt that we need an increase in indemnity, but we should not have had to wait ten years for it. Colleagues of mine in all parts of the House are in serious financial difficulties. It may be their own fault in that they have been overly generous, but you are always asked to be fairly generous when people are trying to raise money for charitable purposes. It is very nice if you are affluent enough to make a hand-out as a sort of emergency measure. I remember that prior to the 1963 increase I was getting a further \$1,000 into debt to the bank each year and, like every other hon. member, if I was out of town I tried to get someone to buy me a meal. I simply did not have the three bucks for the price of a meal. I am not suggesting that I am badly off. My family has mostly grown up now and I do not need as much as some other hon. members. Certainly I do not need as much now as I did when I had a family of five or six children at home who were growing up.

An hon. Member: Well, which was it?

Mr. Peters: The hon. member laughs when I give the number of children I have had. Some people have a set number of children, but at my own home this was not necessarily so. One night I went home and found we had added another 15-year-old. My other young boys found him sleeping in a car and since it was getting cold decided to bring him home, and he lived with us for about a year and a half. So the number varied. I thought I should explain that, Mr. Speaker.

I do not oppose this legislation on the question of amount. I oppose it because I am afraid that unless some of us take a very strong stand we will again find ourselves passing the same sort of legislation some time in the future. I do not think it is fair to ask Members of Parliament to vote their own increases. We should not be put in this kind of position. There is a rule that we are not allowed to participate in something that is to our financial advantage, and with the exception of increasing our salary it is true that we do not.

I think a government that has pledged itself to providing leadership should appoint some person outside the government to negotiate our indemnity so that the public is made aware of how the negotiations are carried on.