

### THE SESSIONAL INDEMNITY.

The increase made last Session of Parliament in the Sessional Indemnity paid to members of both Houses of Parliament has become a very live question.

A measure of this kind which involves a fixed annual charge upon the public revenue belongs to the class of those that should be submitted openly to Parliament and the country for free and ample discussion. It is not in harmony with the constitutional principles of a country governed by a Parliament, representing all classes of the people and all interests, for the members of the House invested with the spending power to consider and to decide upon any expenditure of public money in a manner so private as to prevent the constituencies also considering and deciding upon the expenditure proposed.

Were the practice to become established of holding private gatherings of the members of the House of Commons to decide upon what expenditures should be made of the public revenue, a very dangerous situation might be created. The House of Commons by such a practice would abdicate its chief function and the national revenue would be to a large extent, at the disposal of the respective party leaders who organized and controlled the private arrangements for spending money without full explanations and without free debates. When the proposal was made for increasing the Sessional Indemnity up to \$2,500 with other new expenditures for the personal advantage of members, present or prospective, the proposal should have followed constitutional precedents and principles by first being submitted to the independent judgment of the House of Commons, and through the House to the people whom it is supposed to represent. The proposal to increase the Sessional Indemnity did not follow constitutional precedents and principles; it was considered and decided upon outside the House of Commons, without public debate, the Bill by which it is authorized was only submitted to Parliament, to both Commons and Senate, after an arrangement had been entered into for it to be passed as a matter of form. Though this proceeding was not, in a technical sense distinctly unconstitutional, it was certainly out of harmony with constitutional principles, and contrary to constitutional usages.

The supreme control of the national revenue was only won by the House of Commons after a civil war and a Revolution—the right is too sacred to be tampered with. All proposals to spend public money should be made openly, in the House of Commons in such a manner as to provoke a free debate and to elicit also an expression of the opinions of the electorate whose money is to be disbursed in paying members of Parliament for at-

tendance on their duties as representatives of the people.

The probable effect of raising the Sessional Indemnity to \$2,500 is a very serious, far reaching question. The very term applied to the payment to members of Parliament clearly indicates its purpose. The members are paid a certain amount to *indemnify* them for the expense they are put to by attendance upon Parliament.

The idea of *reward* for their services is wholly absent, nor is there any element of discrimination in the amount paid. It is well known that the majority of the members of both Houses take a very small part in the work of legislation, the burden of which, on both sides of the House, is borne by a small minority who are most assiduous in their attendance and devoted to their Parliamentary duties. Were the Sessional Indemnity anything more than a payment to recoup, or indemnify the members for their expenses at Ottawa, some of them would be paid far more than others. But this is not so, therefore, the question narrows itself down to this. What is a fair sum to indemnify a member for residing at Ottawa during a Parliamentary Session? The cost varies, but if the Session extends for four months, that is only 120 days, and if \$5 per day is allowed, which is far beyond the highest rate of the leading hotel, the total cost of the Session to each member at that rate would be only \$600, or \$750 for a five-month Session. The expense of travelling is covered by another arrangement.

How then can \$2,500 be regarded as a proper amount for Sessional Indemnity when it exceeds the actual requirement by from \$1,750 to \$1,900?

As a matter of notoriety the average cost of the Session to the great majority of the members is not over \$300, for some, much less, so that, the sum of \$2,500 provides not only sufficient to indemnify them for attendance at Ottawa during the Session, but a comfortable income for the rest of the year.

The probable, the almost inevitable result of providing members with an annual income will be to attract into political life, persons who will form a class of professional members of Parliament, as they will rely for an annual income on their Sessional Indemnity. They will correspond to the members who, when the British Parliament was in its degraded condition, were actually the pensioners of the Crown, or paid servitors of the Government.

The people of Canada want no such conditions to arise in this country. They desire representatives who will be proud of the privilege, of the honour of sitting in Parliament, and be amply satisfied to be simply indemnified for the cost by a moderate, an equitable Sessional Indemnity.

---

MONTREAL CLEARING HOUSE.—Total for week ending March 29th, 1906, clearings, \$25,296,910; corresponding week 1905, \$22,746,371; corresponding week 1904, \$16,126,540.