

Senate and House of Commons Act

increase. I believe we should practice what we preach, and we are preaching restraint. I insist that we should deny ourselves such special privileges as retroactivity and freedom from income tax. I think we should give the lead in the battle to level up the standards of living of those who are down, and the place where that should start is with some of us who are at or near the top. I believe that we should be concerned, not with our monetary relationship with the people who are high in the public service, but with our relationship with the people that it is our privilege and our honour to represent. Therefore, I intend to vote against the third reading of this bill. If in spite of my opposition it carries, I shall govern myself according to my vote.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilbert Rondeau (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, I did not have the opportunity during the debate on the motion for second reading to make comments on Bill C-242. I shall try not to repeat the arguments put forward on the motion for third reading.

I agree with most other hon. members that it may be embarrassing to vote in favour of an increase of our salaries and allowances, especially when there are in Canada thousands of unemployed who are not getting any pay.

That is why we think it is not the proper time for us to increase our salaries and allowances, particularly in view of present economic conditions in Canada.

We should not be compelled to tolerate the blunders of the present government, but since the people generally judge Parliament by its achievements, we refuse to support the economic policy of the government and be blamed for having been in favour of an increase of members' indemnities, while Canadians are experiencing such deplorable economic conditions.

Mr. Speaker, when an employee asks for a raise, the boss immediately checks his performance record in order to see how efficient he is. Any good boss, once he has determined that the employee's work is satisfactory, will readily grant him a raise.

In our case, we have to vote ourselves higher indemnities and allowances, but on the other hand, if we believe in democracy, the people are still the boss. We know at the present time that the Canadian people—and we had proof of it last Monday in the four by-elections—are altogether dissatisfied with the economic policy of the government. That is one of the reasons why we are inclined to vote against this bill.

Our position, so far, on the increase of pay and allowances for members of Parliament, is as follows: We would have preferred, because of the present economic conditions, unemployment, the great number of welfare cases, income tax and other taxes, that all people must pay—not to mention the threat of new taxes in the soon to be introduced budget—the provision of services for members in their ridings. We are quite serious about it, especially since we have to put up with the policy of this government and, when we go back to our ridings, we

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

have to meet 40, 50, 60 or 75 people struggling with problems of welfare, unemployment insurance, taxes, jobs, industrial development, forms to fill and telephone calls. In fact, telephone calls average from 35 to 40 on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, and from 60 to 75 on Saturdays and Sundays. On the other hands, our wives at home must act as secretaries, calling welfare offices, organizing meetings, going to city hall, phoning the mayor because people consult us about municipal problems and receiving people who trust their representative and ask him to give them a hand or to solve their problems.

We deplore the fact that the government did not take into consideration the recommendations of the Beaupré committee in that regard. I would like to ask the sponsor of Bill C-242, the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) if, tomorrow morning, I hire a secretary in my riding to help me in my work, will her salary be deductible from my income tax and will I be able to give her a T-4 slip.

So far, I have not read in the regulations or in the speeches of those who preceded me that an hon. member had the right to hire an employee whom he would pay out of his salary and to deduct that amount from his income tax.

We must also take into account the work of the member's wife, who does at least as much in her home answering inquiries from constituents, from 8 in the morning until 10 or 11 at night seven days a week, as any secretary working in Parliament. However, this work is not acknowledged by the general public.

I am not saying the wife should be paid, but that we should have a secretary, male or female, to spare our wives the work they are called upon to perform when we are away; because, when an elector has a problem, he does not ask himself whether the member is at home or in Ottawa, especially in urban areas where 60 per cent of the people can be reached simply by dialing a telephone number. That is why some members like myself get at least 50 telephone calls on days when we are away, and twice as many on Saturdays and Sundays when we are home.

The problem is serious and also explains the fact that many wives come to hate politics; they become aware of the problems of the public in general, and it happens that they do not like to be overworked, especially when they have to look after a family.

This time I would like to bring another matter to the attention of the government: every time the Crétitistes propose in the House social measures such as increasing the old age security pensions or family allowances, the government never fails to say: Where shall we get the money? However, when it comes to increasing members' allowances and expenses, the question does not seem to be raised. I know very well that this is not a problem for the government as the latter will take the money from new taxes that sooner or later it will ask Parliament to vote.