

Senate and House of Commons Act

know my position. I realize the sincerity of people who have spoken on both sides of this question. We have just heard a spokesman from our party speaking on the other side of the matter from myself. I know the way some people look on this question. They believe it is justifiable to be taking this step. There may be amendments which they believe would be desirable, but on the principle of the bill they are in agreement. They have a perfect right to see things as they do and to speak as they wish. This is our right in Parliament, and thank goodness we have this type of Parliament.

I grant, also, that the needs of Members of Parliament vary considerably. It is impossible to tell what the needs of individual Members of Parliament may be. Some of us have hidden obligations which do not meet the eye. Others obviously have difficulties in respect of the size and type of constituency they serve. Still others have families in which children are at an age when they are receiving university or vocational training. There are a great variety of needs.

I have always been in favour, and have said so in our caucus and elsewhere, of some attempt being made to meet these varying expenses. I think the chairman of the committee which looked into this matter was correct when he spoke of having vouchers for expenses certainly in so far as these involve travel and overnight hotel accommodation for members in rural ridings. I think he was quite right. I believe there should be in this legislation some attempt to discriminate in favour of members not only in northern ridings but in difficult ridings, and discrimination also in respect of other types of expense.

I am surprised, however, by the government's attitude. When it has come to the poor people, the people on pension or the people on social assistance, this government has been very much in favour of a means test or, in more polite words, a needs test. The government has taken the position that before people can get anything from public funds if they are poor, handicapped or old, they have to lay the little cash they have on the table and make it abundantly clear that they must have this extra help because of their financial situation and economic need. I cannot understand why the government has lost all enthusiasm for that approach when it comes to the salaries and allowances of Members of Parliament. It would seem to me that if a means or a needs test is a good thing people in the lower income bracket, the government would think it to be an excellent thing for Members of Parliament. They are using one yardstick for the poor and another for those who are not so poor. This is what the public notices particularly and does not like about this legislation.

This across-the-board lavishness shows up badly, especially when it includes people in the other place. People in some sections of our community do not feel that those in the other place do a necessary job of work. It seems rather unnecessary to many people that the people in the other place should have that kind of old age consideration even if they are in a chamber which is so ornate and traditional.

It seems to me the whole question of increases in salaries and allowances of Members of Parliament

depends very much on how one looks at it. Some members make comparisons between their incomes and those of senior public servants. True, I have not yet heard anyone make a comparison with the salary of Mr. Rasminsky the governor of the Bank of Canada. However, if Mr. Rasminsky could get an increase from \$50,000 a year to \$75,000 a year, surely some Members of Parliament who look at it in this way would consider we are mere pikers to settle for what we will be receiving under this bill. Surely they are worth what Mr. Rasminsky is worth to our country. Why should they settle for a piddling amount in comparison with his salary?

If we look at it in this way, there is no end to the value we could set upon our service to the country. However, I do not think that is the way to look at it. I know there are people who look at it in that way but I do not. I feel we are here to represent the people of our ridings. There are people in our ridings who have a different point of view from those who elected us, because they lean toward another party. But we are here to serve all of them. To my mind it is essential that there be not too large a discrepancy between what we get and what the people who sent us here are getting. If there is too big a discrepancy in income there will be too great a discrepancy in point of view. Too big a discrepancy in income means too big a discrepancy in outlook. I think this is one danger in increasing salaries and allowances of Members of Parliament away beyond the salaries and allowances of the majority of our constituents. For this reason, if for no other, I am opposed to this legislation. I am opposed for other reasons also.

I receive many letters about this matter. I received one today from and old age pensioner. He wrote protesting the increase for Members of Parliament at this time when he must get along on \$80. This is a perfectly normal and logical way of looking at it, in my view. I do not think I am that much more valuable to the community than he is. He did all he could in his time, and I am trying to do what I can in mine.

• (3:10 p.m.)

If we are serious, honest and genuine when we talk about all of us having a right to equality of opportunity and to be considered worthy of sharing the things of this country in a dignified way, I think it is dishonest—if you want me to throw that word around—to say we are worth so much more than the old age pensioner and other people on low incomes. I do not think we are, and it is a crooked way of looking at society, in my view. I think we should be here to speak, above all, for the people who are not in a position to speak for themselves.

The people who are worst off should get our attention first, and the ones who need it the most should be given the biggest pay boost. You may say that this philosophy is crazy, that it belongs to the dark ages of Christianity, to the teachers and the preachers about whom my colleague spoke, who did not know any better a generation ago than to want to serve without increasing their salaries—but I do not look at it that way. I think we are here to represent the people in our ridings who most need our representations. Until we can get a proper living stand-