

Members' Salaries

whole that they are entitled to a 33½ per cent increase now, with a constant 7 per cent increase on top of that each year indefinitely in the future. If it does that the policy will have no relevance as an anti-inflationary policy, assuming such an approach has validity in the first place. I am saying that we have in this legislation a wage package, a salary proposal, for ourselves as members of parliament, which will far exceed any kind of proposal the government will introduce in the next few weeks and want the rest of the people of Canada to accept. I say that that amounts to a kind of hypocrisy. It really amounts to saying, "Let us provide for ourselves now very abundantly before we tighten the belt for everyone else in the country." I say that kind of policy is not leadership at all, but is just the opposite.

I wish to conclude on that note. My party, I believe, has fought a good fight on this measure. With the exception of one or two members, who in good conscience disagree with us, on the whole our party by an overwhelming majority has been opposed to this measure because we do not think it is equitable or shows the kind of economic leadership required in this country, and which the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) have been called upon to give. I think it is a bad bill and will vote against it at third reading.

Mr. Tom Cossitt (Leeds): Mr. Speaker, I rise to place briefly on the record the reasons why I cannot support this legislation. To me this is not a case, and it should not be a case, of whether members of parliament need an increase in salary. Instead, it should be an occasion for parliament to set an example for the Canadian people. It should be an occasion when parliament, in the interests of the country, and at a time when the cost of living is galloping forward completely unrestrained, puts first and foremost on its agenda the setting of an example in restraint.

If parliament, despite its personal needs, cannot set an example for the Canadian people then, Mr. Speaker, who on earth can do this? If parliament goes to the public till to draw out more funds for itself, then how can we ask others across the country to keep down their demands in the interest of bringing inflation under control? How can one support this bill when old age pensioners are crying out against high prices and their inability to buy some of the ordinary every-day things that so many of us take for granted? How can one support this bill when we know that one of the most important things is for government expenses to be curtailed, and yet parliament is prepared to do just the opposite for itself?

The government has failed utterly in its approach to attacking the problems of inflation, and it has failed utterly in its approach to the curtailment of government expenses. It is essential that first things should come first, to make use of an old saying. By dealing with this legislation we are most certainly not placing first things first. The first thing we should be doing is taking measures to slow down the rapid growth in the cost of living, and when we have progressed well along such a road then, and only then, would be the time for parliament to look at the matter of its own salaries.

I have been surprised to note in the press on several occasions that some members of this House have said they have received no complaints on this legislation from their

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

constituencies, or perhaps it is the fault of the deteriorating mail service. I have found that this is one subject which concerns the people of this country far more than many other subjects. I have received, on this subject, far more mail and telephone calls than on most other subjects since I was elected a member of this House.

I should like to read for the record some excerpts from letters I have received both from my constituency and elsewhere. One gentleman from Gannanoque included in his letter this most appropriate expression and question:

I ask you how you can conscientiously vote for this pay increase in your salary when there are so many poor in Canada who need help, and will this not contribute to inflation?

From another constituent in the city of Brockville we have these words:

When industry and labour is being asked to exercise restraint, when Canada is in the midst of very serious inflation, how can you seriously consider a one third increase in salaries for Members of Parliament and indexing them for the future in such a way that the increase in the next few years will amount to far more than the original proposal of fifty per cent?

Another letter I received contained these somewhat emotional words:

Surely to God there is some semblance of decency left in the House of Commons. Surely the aged and the less fortunate should not be forced to suffer in misery and silence while Members of Parliament stick their hands in the public cash register.

Another letter read:

My own personal view is that all members knew the pay structure when they decided to stand for election and it seems like dirty pool to then turn around and look for an increase in pay immediately.

Another letter contains the following paragraph:

I can think of no measure that any government could take that would invite run-away inflation that would be more effective than this legislation on salaries. If this bill is passed and if it receives the support of all parties, then one must reach the conclusion that the whole parliamentary operation is a charade.

There are many other similar phrases in other letters I have received. I am sure they are nothing more than an echo of the letters received by probably everyone on every side in this House.

I should like to read one final quotation from a letter which I think puts the situation quite clearly:

Mitchell Sharp's arguments are full of holes and resemble a sieve. This apparent lack of good judgment on the part of the government is something I protest in the strongest possible terms. The very thought of our elected representatives considering such an increase in these times of economic distress leaves me saddened and disillusioned.

I think the last word in the sentence that I have just quoted says it all. That word is "disillusioned". The people of this country have expected something better from parliament than what has been received. The people of this country expected us to set an example here in Ottawa and to press that example forward across this country by following it up with measures to really fight inflation. The government has not done that. Anything short of this in my opinion is shirking our responsibilities to the Canadian people and abandoning our principles.

Previous speakers have dealt with particular items in this legislation that are disagreeable and, rather than repeat many of the arguments already stated, I would simply like to comment briefly on two particular points.