

*Salaries Act***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

**SALARIES ACT****AMENDMENT TO INCREASE SALARIES OF LIEUTENANT GOVERNORS**

The House resumed, from Thursday, May 15, consideration of the motion of Mr. Sharp that Bill C-24, to amend the Salaries Act, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates.

**Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina-Lake Centre):** Last night, Mr. Speaker, I began my remarks in response to an invitation by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) to take part in the debate.

**An hon. Member:** That was a mistake.

**Mr. Benjamin:** I was glad to accept the hon. gentleman's invitation. The interjections which I made in the speech by the Leader of the Opposition came after he had made some remarks about not picking on one or more groups, such as lieutenant governors, judges or members of parliament, and singling them out when it comes to restraint. I interjected then, and I repeat now, that it is a little difficult to feel any concern about increases for people who are getting \$25,000, \$35,000 or \$45,000 a year.

It is even more difficult to accept or even listen to anyone attempting to justify percentage increases in incomes at those levels, increases which in real dollars reflect incomes for those categories far in excess of what is necessary or desirable. The same percentage increases for people with incomes less than \$12,000 or \$13,000 a year would be meaningful. I submit they are excessive and somewhat obscene for people earning between \$25,000 and \$50,000 a year.

● (1210)

The Leader of the Opposition said that he was getting a little tired of the talk of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) about restraint, and that he would like to see us support some program of restraint. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent), the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands (Mr. Douglas) and others of this party have put forward proposals on quite a few occasions during the last two years. The fact that some hon. members chose not to listen to them or reply to them cannot be blamed on us.

I remind the House, particularly the Leader of the Opposition, that we have been saying for quite some time that there has to be restraint. But we have submitted in the past, and we submit again, that the restraint has to start at the top, not at the bottom. It is obscene, or at least unseemly for members of parliament to sit in this place and propose increases for high income groups while urging low income earners and people on fixed incomes in Canada to show restraint.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) was complaining the other day that wages and salaries represent 70 per cent of total income in Canada so obviously, in his terms, this was a major sector of the economy to show restraint. But

[Mr. McKinnon.]

he conveniently omitted the fact that this 70 per cent includes high income earners such as executives, judges, senators and members of parliament, lieutenant governors, lawyers, doctors and other professionals, engineers, and so on, all of whom earn incomes ranging between \$25,000 and \$75,000 a year. This is the area where restraint must be exercised. As far as we are concerned, people earning \$6,000, \$8,000 or \$10,000 per year are entitled to all the increases they can get, if for no other reason than to bring about a greater measure of equality in this society.

We have had recently statistics showing that a family of five people—husband, wife and three children—on an income of less than \$15,000 a year in the city of Toronto is not going to make it. Such a family will not be able to meet the price of housing, food and other necessities of life if they live in a city like Toronto. Yet we have the gall—when I say “we”, I should say the government and members of the official opposition—to suggest that people in such income categories and even lower should show restraint. They then try to plead, on behalf of themselves as members of parliament, on behalf of judges, and now on behalf of lieutenant governors, that increases ranging from 20 per cent to 90 per cent are justified. This is sheer nonsense.

When the Liberals and Tories talk about restraint for the poor, it reminds me of days of old when peasants were supposed to stand by the roadside and doff their caps and touch their forelocks as dukes, earls and lords rode by. Today they drive by in their Cadillacs and Lincoln Continentals on their way to open parliament, or to the courthouse, or even on their way to the House of Commons.

If the Minister of Finance, the government and the members of the official opposition think for one moment that ordinary, average Canadians will hold still or accept the pleadings and urgings of restraint while we pass Bill C-44, Bill C-47, Bill C-24, and Bill C-23 still to come, then they are kidding themselves. The public will not accept it because it is unfair. It is so basically unfair that one would think no member of this chamber would have the nerve to put forward legislation of this kind while asking the poor to show restraint.

I would have been more inclined to support a pay raise for parliamentarians had we first done something about increasing the old age pension. We were able to get the reluctant acceptance of the government to tie old age pensions to the cost of living, but the problem with this is that the percentage is based on too low a basic amount. This country can afford to double the basic old age pension right now. It would not be inflationary. The people on old age pensions and low incomes are not the ones who cause inflation. Not only are they not the ones who cause inflation, but they are the first victims of it.

People on salaries between \$25,000 and \$75,000 a year can look after themselves quite nicely, thank you. To grant them a 20 per cent, 30 per cent or 40 per cent increase is totally unjustified. I hear it pleaded on behalf of lieutenant governors that they have not had an increase for 12 years. Something which was conveniently not mentioned last night is the fact that none of them has been there 12 years. In fact, I do not think any lieutenant governor has held his appointment for more than five years. They serve a five-year term and, once in a while, a year or two extra.