

Senate and House of Commons Act

● (4:40 p.m.)

The President of the Privy Council said the government was introducing this measure, not for the benefit of any particular member or members in the House, but in the best interests of Parliament. I want to say that my opposition to this bill derives precisely from my concern for the best interests of Parliament in the eyes of the people of Canada. I think it is impossible for the government or for members of this House to ignore the economic and social context in which the bill before us is being introduced and discussed. If we were living at a time of relatively full employment, with two or three per cent unemployment only, if the promises of three years ago had been even partially fulfilled and some of the inequalities in our society had been lessened, if not removed, if we could look at what Parliament and this government had done in the last three years and feel the people had really benefited from efforts to eradicate or at least to reduce the injustices in our present society, then the President of the Privy Council might have a situation on which to base his statement that he was bringing forward this proposal in the best interests of Parliament.

As things are, I do not believe the bill will serve the best interests of Parliament. I can think of no better way of putting it than the words the minister quoted from Mr. St. Laurent when he was prime minister in 1954. He was quoted by the President of the Privy Council as saying, in connection with a bill of the kind presently before us: "All of us feel a reluctance to do for ourselves what we would not hesitate to do for others." This is what worries me. Can the people of Canada really think that this is the case when they consider all we have failed to do for the poor of Canada, or the limits we have placed upon what we are prepared to do for the old age pensioners in Canada, or the deliberate creation of unemployment throughout the country as a result of government policies, or our failure to remove the slums in this country or even to affect them appreciably, or our failure to build homes for the people who so desperately need them, or the mincing steps we have taken to clear pollution from the environment of our cities, or to clean up the air and waters of Canada for the benefit of the people? Can we sincerely agree with Mr. St. Laurent that we would not hesitate to do for others what we are prepared, now, to do for ourselves? I suggest we cannot, because it is not a correct statement, and because we cannot do so I submit we cannot in conscience support the proposition placed before us today.

Too many millions of people are today suffering deprivation of an extreme kind, and we have taken only a very few uncertain steps to deal with this situation. I am not making an attack on the government only; I suspect that other governments would encounter similar difficulties with respect to some of these intractable problems. But it is in this context I am obliged to look at the bill before us. I cannot support it. I cannot support it because I can imagine what all these people will feel. And there are millions of them. I am not thinking about one per cent of the Canadian people. I am thinking about 80 or 90 per cent of the Canadian people, half of whom are living

[Mr. Lewis.]

in poverty and the other half in extreme financial and economic difficulty. I am thinking about the overwhelming majority of our people, not only those in the industrial plants, in the mines and in the forests, but working people on the farms who are going through a situation of extreme financial want and inadequate cash income.

These are the people we are asking to make our situation relatively quite comfortable. I cannot agree to this. I cannot accept the notion that we have in fact been ready to do for others what we are prepared to do for ourselves, because we have not. Representatives of the government, and the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) himself, have gone about the country saying to the workers: You must not take more than 6 per cent. The Chairman of the Prices and Incomes Commission says: You must not take more than 4 or 5 per cent. The Governor of the Bank of Canada says the increases received by ordinary working-people are too high, that they must come down. This is the context within which the present bill is presented. This Parliament has said to the people of the country generally—and even though I disagree with these statements I am a member of the House: You will have to accept a situation of difficulty and economic pressure, of financial inadequacy. To the poor we have said: We sympathize with you, but you must continue to live in poverty and degradation. To the unemployed we have said: Because we are fighting inflation we shall create unemployment, and we have done so.

I feel it is impossible to support this bill for four simple reasons. First, because of the size of the increase, if any increase is justified. There are Members of Parliament who have been in difficulty and one must recognize that some increase is justified. But this is too much. Second, I object to continuing and increasing the non-taxable allowance. Even if we decided to leave the \$6,000 where it was as a non-taxable allowance, any additional expenses that we allow members to charge to the public treasury ought to be on the basis of vouchers. I object strongly to the provision of seven months retroactivity. Seven-twelfths of the increase will go to Members of Parliament if this bill passes today; if it is passed a month from now it will be eight-twelfths of the total increase. We do not deal with public servants in this way; they must be satisfied with only part of the increase being made retroactive and the rest from the date of settlement. But in this case, the increase is retroactive to October 7 or October 8, whatever the date may be. I object, finally, to the method by which the incomes and expenses of Members of Parliament are adjusted.

Let me deal with each of these objections separately. I do not buy the idea of a 50 per cent increase in salary, leaving the allowance aside. The increase in indemnity proposed is from \$12,000 to \$18,000, that is, 50 per cent. I was among those who were defeated in 1963 before the increase took place and I did not come back until 1965. But I have had occasion to look at *Hansard*.

● (4:50 p.m.)

In 1963, the indemnity of Members of Parliament was increased from \$8,000 to \$12,000 and the non-taxable allowance was increased from \$2,000 to \$6,000. If my