

conflict of interest situation is not one which is easily eliminated, but it is one which I believe would be eliminated by the proposals which are before the House.

Before I get into that question, I think I should very briefly review the events leading up to this bill. The bill before us is a government bill like all other government bills, but it is worth noting that there were consultations among backbench members of the various parties which prodded the government into bringing forth such legislation. These were not official consultations with any party; indeed, they cannot really even be dignified by the title of an ad hoc commission or committee. They were general consultations with members of all parties, consultations which proceeded normally on a bilateral basis, that is, between two members at a time, one member of one party and one of another party, backbench members of all the parties being involved. On one occasion there was a slightly more formal meeting at which members of all parties but one, the NDP were represented, but the NDP backbenchers with whom consultation was taking place were informed of the results of the meeting and gave it their blessing.

So there is considerable support by members of all parties in this House for a proposal with terms very similar to those in the bill before us today. The result was, as I have said, a measure for which the government and hon. members on this side must take the responsibility, but which I am confident will also find support from members of all parties in the House.

I have spoken about the question of conflict of interest. This is a very serious problem and one which has greatly exercised members of parliament, especially in the last year, perhaps because of events in other countries where we saw the dire consequences which can result from lack of sufficient concern in public life about this matter. We have passed new election expenses legislation which we believe goes a long way toward solving the problems in that area, and we have before a parliamentary committee a government paper with respect to other forms of conflict of interest in respect of members of parliament.

The question of the proper remuneration for members of parliament is perhaps the most subtle of all the forms of conflict of interest which could be before us, because essentially in a parliamentary democracy there is no one else who can ultimately deal with this problem. For instance, it is often said that members of parliament are elected on the understanding that they will not increase their salaries during their term of office. However, the fact is that from the very beginning of our country members of parliament have always exercised that right. It has therefore come to be assumed that members of parliament are elected with the knowledge that they can at any time increase their remuneration, yet they have exercised this power with some restraint in the past and I have no doubt will continue to do so in the future.

I and most hon. members of this House think it is important that we arrive at some formula which will enable us to establish a method which puts this decision at arm's length from us. One possibility would be to link increases in salary and expenses for members of parliament to those of members of the public service or members of some groups in the private sector. It has been suggested,

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for instance, that we should be linked to annual increases for people in professional occupations, to people in executive posts or simply to people in higher posts in the public service. But quite apart from the difficulty of deciding which group members of parliament are like—and I think we all feel that we in this House have a unique occupation which is not easily categorized with any other—it seems to me that there are very fundamental difficulties in making this kind of correlation, difficulties which I think we would not find very satisfactorily resolved in the long run.

In their ad hoc consultations, most members of parliament tended not to look on this option with very great favour even though it would have brought them undoubtedly—as any comparison with the public service would indicate—both a higher salary now and a higher salary in the future. In other words, I think that the principal aim of members of parliament in supporting a bill such as this is not simply to increase their own remuneration: it is also to establish an objective reference for the kind of remuneration which will be as fair to the public as it is to themselves.

Another possibility is to have an outside commission make recommendations. This possibility is one which obviously has to be considered very seriously. We have already had the Beaupré commission. The front bench of the NDP is recommending that we should again have an outside commission which would make recommendations to parliament as to what is an adequate scale of salary. But we had an outside commission; we had the Beaupré commission which recommended that the salary level should be \$25,000 in the twenty-ninth parliament. Applying the industrial composite index to that would have brought us a salary in the present parliament of \$29,115. That would be the result of the recommendations of one commission which was, I think, a commission as objective as any which could be found.

The objection which members of parliament have to referring this matter to an outside commission is not that we would be afraid that it would not make a recommendation which would do us justice. Indeed, the commission I have referred to made a recommendation of \$29,000 for the present parliament, which is larger than the amount the government has come forward with in this bill or which the members of parliament who consulted each other recommended to the government. Rather, the objection lies in fact that there is, then, the added difficulty that we are still in the embarrassing position of having to vote the increase ourselves. We would still have to exercise our own judgment in a matter of self-interest. This is precisely the position from which we set out to remove ourselves.

I believe that if we were to refer the question to an outside commission, it would have to be a kind of arbitration commission. It would have to be a commission from whom we would accept, without question and without the need for further legislation, the proposals it would make. It is possible that this question will receive further consideration by hon. members. However, as they proceeded last fall, the people who consulted informally on this question felt that the question should be phrased in terms of an outside standard and the two outside standards to which they made reference were the consumer price index (CPI) and the industrial composite index (IPI). I want to