

Senate and House of Commons Act

When I rose I said I supported the bill. On sitting down, I also say I support the bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Léonel Beaudoin (Richmond): Mr. Speaker, it is with much apprehension that I rise today to take a stand on Bill C-242, an Act to amend the Senate and House of Commons Act, the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act and an Act to make provision for the retirement of members of the Senate.

It is always very embarrassing for a member to say whether he will vote for or against an increase in his own salary. The matter requires of course a serious self-examination, but I would nevertheless like to express my views frankly on the question.

I respect the opinions expressed by my hon. colleagues, and I will not hold their vote against them, even though I do not always share their viewpoints.

Mr. Speaker, hon. members have listened with a great deal of interest to the plea made by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) on April 26, during which he announced governmental proposals to increase members' salaries and allowances. One must not right away that the right hon. Prime Minister took shelter behind the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Parliamentary Salaries and Expenses, under the chairmanship of Mr. T. N. Beaupré, president of Domtar Limited. The Prime Minister summarized them as follows:

—the future of Canada depends largely upon the ability of the public to secure the services of the best possible people as parliamentarians.

—salaries should be high enough to attract persons of proven ability at a time when their earning potential may be at its highest.

—the position of the parliamentarian is essentially a full-time occupation; his working day in the House of Commons is usually much longer than the industrial average.

—the tenure of office of a member of the House of Commons is uncertain; 292 members have been defeated in the past 12 years with probably more to come.

—the nature of the position is becoming increasingly more time-consuming, more complicated, more sensitive and requiring considerable moral courage.

—a member of Parliament must meet many expenses that are not common to other salary earners and that are not deductible for income tax purposes, as is the practice in many other countries.

And the right hon. Prime Minister added:

It is the view of the government, Mr. Speaker, that the interests of Canada will not be served if Parliament fixes the levels of compensation of the elected representatives of the people at a level which is either so high as to attract candidates for reasons of financial gain, or so low as to deny effectively the opportunity of parliamentary service to all but those possessing private incomes. In the judgment of the government the second hazard is of more immediate cause for concern than is the first.

Those are the words of the right hon. Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, from a personal standpoint I think there is some good in the arguments advanced by the right hon. Prime Minister and, in another occasion, in another time and in a better economic context, I would certainly adhere to government's proposals for I really need this

[Mr. Gilbert.]

increase since I represent a rural riding which is about 100 miles long with some 50 municipalities and nearly 80,000 people. Moreover, I have to provide for the livelihood of ten children. But, in the present circumstances and particularly in the present economic situation, at a time when thousands of workers are unemployed, when the rise in the cost of living has not been curbed, when economists tell us the greatest danger we are exposed to is inflation, I cannot accept these proposals. Indeed, Mr. John Young, chairman of the Prices and Incomes Commission stated yesterday in Vancouver that inflation had not yet been licked and that employers and workers should show some moderation in their claims for higher salaries and profits.

Mr. Speaker, I am thus under obligation to object to the raise in indemnities and allowances which has been proposed by the government. First the government pretend that such a measure will attract to Parliament men with higher qualifications and in a better position to solve the economic problems of Canada.

In the first place, let me question this assumption. Let us suppose for a moment that Parliament were "full up" with economists and lawyers. Would that solve the problem of the unemployed? If business is bad, if the economy is upside down, should it be blamed on members or on the leaders of the government who accept an archaic and obsolete financial system which deprives the consuming public of its necessary spending power. The government is advised by economists, lawyers and civil servants. These are all educated and qualified people, as the Prime Minister said. However, they have led the Canadian economy to the brink of bankruptcy, mainly on account of their evident inability to equitably administer all the classes of our society.

● (2:50 p.m.)

Meanwhile, the government refuses to increase old age security pensions and family allowances, and to establish a guaranteed annual income for all Canadians.

In support of my statement I shall quote figures on votes taken in the House of Commons since the opening of This Parliament in 1968. Four times the Progressive Conservative members united with the Liberal members to defeat motions from the Ralliement créditiste or the New Democratic party concerning the guaranteed minimum income, increased family allowances and increased purchasing power for those whose needs are greater. On the occasion of very important votes on other proposals aimed at improving the condition of the poor, the Progressive Conservative members supported the members of the Ralliement créditiste or of the New Democratic party, but the Liberal majority always opposed such proposals. Let me make a few remarks on some previous votes.

On October 28, 1969 and on October 13, 1970, the motion on the guaranteed minimum income was defeated by the government.

On November 5, 1968, June 10, 1969 and October 28, 1969, motions to reduce taxes were defeated by the government.