

Senate and House of Commons Act

member have an interesting conversation while he is deafened by the noise of two typewriters?

When some visitors call on us, we have to ask the secretaries to wait in the hall.

This situation should have been foreseen long ago. However, very little progress is being made.

I do insist on those points in order to have the situation corrected as soon as possible. In the Beaupré report, mention is made of those conditions. However, all the recommendations put forward therein have been ignored in the drafting of the bill before the House. This is one thing that surprises us and it will surely surprise both the authors of this report and the public.

We are often asked this question lately: "Will you accept this salary increase if the bill is passed? Of course, we will accept it. At least as far as I am concerned, I will accept it. When we vote against tax increases and that the majority, the government steam roller, votes in favour of those tax increases, we agree to pay for them. This is why we accept these salary increases if they are granted. The news media are already reporting that it is an accomplished fact. Such is not the case. Once we have accepted this increase, if it is adopted, we will use this money as we please. You can be sure that no member will be at a loss to dispose of this money. The numerous demands made upon us will make it quite easy for us.

I intend to vote against this allowance and salary increase because the government should have thought first of the people instead of their elected representatives.

[*English*]

Mr. Doug Rowland (Selkirk): Mr. Speaker, I shall not be long in my remarks. My purpose in speaking is to register my opposition to the legislation now before us which, among other things, provides for a rather substantial increase in the indemnity and expense allowance paid to Members of Parliament and Senators. I have two real difficulties in so doing. First of all, I do not want my remarks to be interpreted as an attempt at a public display of virtue. My objection is not to a pay increase as such but, rather, to the fact that the pay raise is being provided in the worst possible manner in a piece of legislation that could not be much worse if its drafters had been instructed to make it as bad as human ingenuity could devise.

My second problem is related to the first, in that I find so much wrong with the legislation that I hardly know where to begin criticizing it. I have taken note of the Prime Minister's invitation to amend the bill. I am not taking him up on that invitation because as legislation, this bill is so bad that it needs not so much amendment as total rewriting. The ineptitude of its sponsors is unbelievable.

I have sat in this House for only a year, but I have been able to supplement my limited personal experience on this touchy question of salaries by conversation with my colleagues in all parts of the House. There remains no doubt in my mind that the present salary and expense allowance works severe hardship on many members of this House. Such problems have been well documented in

[*Mr. Laprise.*]

earlier speeches, so I need not go into them again. I am also convinced that the manner in which expenses, especially, are paid creates injustices and inequalities none of which are corrected by this legislation.

Thus, my first objection to the bill is that it does nothing to correct the inequities and injustices in the present method of payment—I shall return to this idea in a moment—and that it attempts to meet the financial problems of some members in a manner which can only suggest to the electorate that their representatives have their hand in the till up to the elbow.

I think it unacceptable that the Liberal government has once again chosen a course of action the end result of which can only be to further debase the reputation of this institution in the eyes of the public. I do not say it is unacceptable because as a member of this House the government's action will also cast discredit on me, although to be honest I do not like that effect one bit; rather, I say this legislation is unacceptable because it is short-sighted and wrong-headed to bring down a piece of legislation which can only further detract from the credibility of the central institution of Canadian democracy, and to do so at a time when powerful social currents are already placing in doubt the utility of the institution. So doing may cause more people to seek other channels of influencing the way in which they are governed, some of which may have the decidedly adverse effect of intensifying the aura of societal confusion and disintegration which characterizes this decade.

This rather unsavoury aspect of the legislation could have been avoided by the simple expedient of having the increase come into effect, not last October but, rather, at the beginning of the next Parliament. I know the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has said that this approach was rejected because he felt it would have the effect of making the next election centre around the issue of MP's salaries and that, in effect, we would be treated to the ridiculous spectacle of candidates for Parliament bidding for office on the basis of how much lower than their opponents' would be the salary they would accept. Undoubtedly, some of the more simple-minded candidates would adopt such an approach but I have enough confidence in the good sense of the Canadian electorate to believe that it would get them very far.

● (8:50 p.m.)

On the other hand, making the raise take effect at the beginning of the next Parliament would give the Canadian public the sense that they do have something to say about the remuneration their representatives are to receive—an opportunity denied them by this legislation. Moreover, it would enable them to view candidates with an eye to determining which of them would be worth the increased emolument, and it would meet the argument—which to me has considerable validity—that we agreed to run for the office knowing what the salary would be and we have no business altering the agreement midway through the term of our contract.

My second objection to the legislation is that it offers no formula to spare Parliament from having to go through this ridiculous and degrading exercise in the