

Members' Salaries

yearly escalation, which by the end of this parliament will give us more than the original 50 per cent, how can we expect, in all honesty, that the workers of this country will accept any kind of consensus proposal by the Minister of Finance?

I think that this bill and the response of the Liberal, and indeed the Conservative, members is an indication that there is a belief on their part that there is no chance of beating inflation in this country; that things are out of hand and it is a case of every man and woman for himself or herself. It would seem that the idea is to make as high a demand as possible, stick to it and gain a salary or wage increase that will insulate one from a worsening inflationary situation because this government has abdicated its responsibility to halt inflation.

Having in mind the debate on the legislation to send the railway workers back to work during the twenty-ninth parliament, and also having in mind some of the comments one hears from members of parliament in this House during the question period and other debates, it would seem that some members are outraged by the demands the working people make and point the finger at them as contributing to inflation. I find that on the whole, up until now the workers primarily are asking for one of two things, either a catch-up settlement because they are behind other workers in society, or a cost of living increase to make up for the loss in real wages because of inflation, as well as an insulator for projected inflation; because we hear projections that even though the cost of living went up 12 per cent last year, there will still be two-digit inflation in the year ahead. So it is logical, if the buying power of wages declined 12 per cent last year and there is a prediction of another 12 per cent this year, that the workers should ask for a cost of living increase.

When I ask my constituents what they think about a wage increase for members of parliament and mention that the last increase was in 1970, they agree that we should not have to fall behind. That is why the New Democratic Party has put forward a proposal that we should receive a salary increase based on the increase in the cost of living since our last wage adjustment in 1970. It is also the reason that back in December we so vigorously opposed the government's attempt to bring in a 50 per cent wage increase. Our opposition in the House, plus general public outrage, forced the government to back down.

Now, however, when we look at the so-called compromise, or backing down, we find that the 33½ per cent will be on the full amount of \$26,000 which represents the basic wage of \$18,000 plus another \$8,000 for expenses. We also hear that the government will propose amendments to cover a yearly increase in our salaries based on the industrial composite wage index. As I said earlier in my remarks, we will in the long run receive more under that formula than under the original formula. The position of the New Democratic Party is that just as workers should legitimately demand a cost of living increase, so should members of parliament. That is why we propose a salary adjustment from 1970 based on the cost of living increase, which is somewhat less than 30 per cent; but we say the increase should be on the basic salary of \$18,000 and not on the amount of \$26,000 as proposed by the government.

[Mr. Symes.]

One might ask why there should not be an increase in the \$8,000 expense allowance. Other members of my party outlined this very clearly, but I wish to mention briefly that so many of the services we previously paid for are now provided by the government while at the same time we still have the tax-free amount of \$8,000. We now have a constituency office which is paid for. We have a constituency secretary whose wages are paid by the government. We also have free newsletter mailing four times a year. This is a privilege we did not have in earlier parliaments. Also, our plane fare once a week to our riding is paid by the government. So we say the tax-free \$8,000 is sufficient to take care of the legitimate expenses of a member of parliament in serving his constituents.

The point that the government makes is—and I listened to the arguments put forward by government members—that our expenses have gone up and therefore the expense allowance should increase. The point is also made that we need higher salaries in order to attract well qualified people to political office. I find that a rather condescending attitude. The suggestion would seem to be that the best kind of people for the Parliament of Canada, representing 22 million Canadians, are those in the upper-income professions such as businessmen, lawyers, doctors, and so on.

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It is suggested that these people sometimes have better political know-how and common sense than ordinary working people who may be making a wage of \$10,000 or less. I have listened to debates in the House in which professionals such as lawyers, doctors, businessmen and academics have taken part, and I have often concluded that if we had more ordinary working people in the House, we would have more common sense in our debates than we have had so far this session.

So I reject totally the argument that we must have high salaries to attract a certain kind of person to run for political office. By running for office, we as members of parliament accept, I should hope, the principle of sacrifice for public office from the point of view of the demand that is made on our time, the demand that is made on our family life and the demand on our income. I think we must realize that this is a service and is not something that should have attached to it the remuneration for some other type of work. How can you measure what an MP should be worth compared with members of other professions? I think we would be remiss if we forgot the idea of dedication to public life and what that entails.

I think that this bill also points out a larger issue, that is, the issue that concerns members of my party: it is not, as the hon. member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow) said, that we expect any political advantage, come election time, from our stand; it will be forgotten by the electorate by 1978. But the fact is that there is an important principle at stake in this whole issue of salary increases for members of parliament. We in this party believe that it is the responsibility of a democratically elected government, a government representing the rich, the middle-income people and the poor in this country, to try to narrow the gap, to reduce the inequality between the wealthy and the poor, and to try to provide a better life for those less