

Members' Salaries

in Lotbinière, as did the hon. members for Shefford (Mr. Rondeau), Rimouski (Mr. Allard), Abitibi (Mr. Laprise), Villeneuve (Mr. Caouette), Kamouraska (Mr. Dionne), or Bellechasse (Mr. Lambert), people realized they had elected a member of parliament who served the people.

I consider an unemployment insurance case as an important one; I consider an old age pension case as an important one. If my fellow citizen does not understand legislation because it is too complex, I think it is my duty to explain it to him and defend his rights. That is what I am paid for: defending interests. That is what my colleagues from the Social Credit do. That is the true basic concept of the creditist member.

It is not original in that some Liberals obviously have the same concept, and some Progressive Conservative members too. I do not know them, but there must be some. There are also some among the New Democrats, but they are getting fewer and fewer, Mr. Speaker, since they have misunderstood the purpose of members of parliament. Anyway, it is important for the citizen to be able to meet his member of parliament representative, at any time, to talk to him, to trust him with his problems, without necessarily paying him, without necessarily binding himself to vote for him, knowing in good faith that his representative will do something about his problem.

Mr. Speaker, such is the system we have established in our constituencies. What are our working conditions, since this is the subject we are dealing with just now? Monday we work in our offices and we leave our constituencies as early as possible in order to return to Ottawa, in spite of the weather. We arrive in Ottawa and we sit from 2 to half past 10 Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, from 2 to 6 Wednesday, and from 11 in the morning to 4 or 5 in the afternoon Fridays. Then we get into our cars to drive back to our constituencies. Gentlemen of the press gallery, take note of this: our wives are alone at home with our children and they are waiting for us.

Personally, I have a six-year old who needs his father and a six-month old daughter. The gentlemen of the press gallery think this is funny. Mr. Speaker, Crediters have fought in the House against other hon. members to try and free our wives. The leader of the NDP himself made a fine speech to extoll all the services of which hon. members can avail themselves. I reminded him that, had it not been for the courage of Crediters, hon. members would still be without offices in federal constituencies. This is not a gain obtained by NDP members, who are unaware of such a function, but by Crediters. Why? In order to protect hon. members' family lives, for they are not slaves like the officials who live in ivory towers, receive exorbitant salaries, and are assured of their jobs. Goodness knows that we, in Quebec, know what job security for a civil servant means, because we have witnessed a stupid strike on this subject; in fact job security means nothing, because we realize that members who want to get elected must work. An official who wants to keep his job should also work.

Mr. Speaker, I feel this debate should give members an opportunity, beyond any political partisanship, whatever their party, to realize their important role in their constituencies, in the House of Commons, in committees, whether they be backbenchers or frontbenchers, Speaker

or clerk. I will not talk about the Sergeant-at-Arms, Mr. Speaker, but of those who are elected—

An hon. Member: Right.

Mr. Fortin: Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that this debate should take place without any partisanship and that we should first ask ourselves what is the role of a member of Parliament.

Even if I did not support the government I want to be quite frank about it to show that I am not speaking on a burst of partisanship. Perhaps I did not feel that the increase initially proposed in Bill C-44 was too much but I know what I am talking about since I was involved in those negotiations. The fact still remains that this is a setback for the government, being forced by NDP blackmailers before people aroused by lying and hypocritical reporters. That is how it is!

Mr. Speaker, it is important that the role of the member of parliament be understood. To give you the history of the hon. member for Bellechasse, for example, hoping however that NDP members will understand it, he is a former farmer from Joly who ran in the riding of Bellechasse and was elected. He is not a man with diplomas from here to there nor a man capable of buying everyone off because he does not have a thick, heavy wallet since he is perhaps one of the members in this House with the greatest number of dependent children, and what I am telling you is serious matter. That member, Mr. Speaker, is in his office in his riding as often as he can. He works as much as he can, accepts all invitations, and NDP members will admit that this is not their case, because they do not visit their constituencies every weekend. Therefore, before they vote on the bill in a partisan and electoral way, I would urge them to consider the situation of other members not egotistically, like they do now, but charitably.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Bellechasse did some figuring because the issue is important for him, as it is for me and for other members. What does this increase represent? Not what a certain Jean Larin said on Radio-Canada when he laughed about members of parliament, imitating Santa Claus by wearing a long beard and standing before a Christmas tree. He never understood the Quebec Parliament, and even less the Parliament in Ottawa.

Mr. Speaker, what did Bill C-44 represent initially? Not an increase of \$60,000, then of \$47,400. No. At \$27,000 each for 264 members of parliament, it represented a total cost of \$7,128,000 a year, and the expenses allowance \$12,000 for each member represented \$3,000,168 a year. When we add those two figures, we conclude that the salary of the 264 members of parliament, whether they are the leader of the New Democratic Party, the Liberal backbenchers, Progressive Conservative supporters or Social Crediters, amounted to \$10,296,000. This is the total cost of the salaries of members of parliament, but not of their increase.

● (2020)

An hon. Member: It is less than for the judges.

Mr. Fortin: It is less than for the judges. Reporters do not say to the population that the 264 members would have paid \$3,564,000 in income tax, and that the balance of \$6,732,000, would have been paid by the public, the taxpayer—

[Mr. Fortin.]