

Members' Salaries

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

● (1650)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, I would make a few short remarks, which I hope are essential to this debate.

As I said earlier in this House and elsewhere, Bill C-44 met with a number of objections among the Canadian people, and therefore a number of misunderstandings.

Mr. Speaker, the thing to be stressed in this debate is the following question: How do the Canadian people view their elected representatives? At what level do they see them? How do they perceive their members of parliament? I sometimes enjoy comparisons. Baseball players, football players, hockey players, whose performance the New Democrats watch as everyone else, are paid \$50,000, \$60,000, \$100,000 or \$125,000 a year for a short season. People will even pay \$5, \$10, \$20, \$25, \$30 or even \$50 for an opportunity to go and see them play, but nobody protests against that fact, not even the New Democrats.

Curiously, socialism does not apply in this case; but when it comes to politicians, those who represent the people, who make laws in the highest court of the country, the House of Commons, then enters socialism. For puritan and electoral reasons, it is going to be argued that the politicians' work is going to be diminished. But in so doing, the hon. leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent) does indeed bring support to the false views held about the politician and his public image being diminished. Such views, Mr. Speaker, reflect in my opinion a serious lack of understanding of the important role of the member of parliament. It seems to me, Mr. Speaker,—

An hon. Member: Buying prestige!

Mr. Fortin: Buying prestige! That's it. According to the socialist system, one must take money away from those having \$100,000 and give \$5,000 to everyone. If socialists had their say, there would no longer be rich and poor, but only have-nots without anybody to represent them, as in Cuba.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this kind of argument unfortunately has been overly used and exaggerated by newsmen who, in this case, did not show a conscientious approach to their work by reporting them in the papers; as a result, public opinion will keep maintaining an attitude of reserve to their duly elected representatives.

The citizen of the Lotbinière riding, Mr. Speaker, as anyone of any constituency, has got the news from the radio, the television or the papers, he has been witness to those exaggerations and falsehoods. For the time being, let us disregard the fact that I am for or against the principle of this bill or the amount of increases, and, for a moment, let us forget the figures concerned. Let us consider only the principle. I live on Notre Dame Street, in Victoriaville, and I read in the papers: "Members of Parliament up their salaries to \$44,400". In addition, on the screen of his television set, he can see a broadcast of the CBC, with a man by a Christmas tree saying: Members of Parliament will play their own Santa Claus and vote themselves increases of up

[Mr. Deputy Speaker.]

to \$47,440 and ministerial allowances will be raised to \$65,000. First, Mr. Speaker, the poor man in the street who shoulders inflation cannot see any solution in sight. Second, he feels that members of parliament go a little too far, because he does not know that he is being misled by newsmen who do nothing except speak ill of Canadian men in public life.

I think it is high time for us to speak out. It is very easy for people at the top to judge people at the bottom, and very easy too to write anything in the papers. Mr. Speaker, I will say that today the House of Commons has passed judgment on the hon. member for Témiscamingue (Mr. Caouette). Today, people passed judgment, and quite a sweeping judgment, on a member of parliament, but he will appear before the committee without any problem. We do not fear that. Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member for Témiscamingue is to be responsible to the public, if he is to account for his expenses and his salary, as a representative of the people, I also say that those who stand for the public opinion or those public faces in the press gallery who come here to see and hear what is happening in the House and report it accurately should be worthy of their salary and carry out their job in as scrupulous a way as the hon. member for Témiscamingue or other members do.

Mr. Speaker, it is very easy to pass judgment. How many reporters are now in the gallery? I can see only one. Mr. Speaker, they will be saying tomorrow that the members of Parliament did not have a quorum, that they are present only during the question period, for the exciting bit, and they will be backed up by members of the New Democratic Party and of the Progressive Conservative Party and sometimes by ministers. After that, they beat it and hon. members do their work, and columnists contribute through their often fraudulent writings to misrepresent the functions of members of parliament to citizens who are deprived of adequate information. That is why, Mr. Speaker, I have always insisted in this House that members should have the necessary money to inform their constituents. And one of the wonderful means they could be given, and I once again urge the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp) to take it into account, would be this: instead of giving each member 16 copies of *Hansard* every day which is ridiculous when you represent 85,000 constituents, members should be granted not monies, and let that be so reported, "not money" but more copies of *Hansard* so that they could, with the help of reports written in black and white, inform their fellow citizens and show them the other side of the picture which newspapermen do not describe.

Mr. Speaker, may I call it five o'clock?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If the hon. member calls it five o'clock, it will have to be with the unanimous consent of the House. Is the House agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Fortin: In the same spirit, if this mood—

An hon. Member: We all agree to call it five o'clock.

[*English*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Shall we call it five o'clock?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.