

Senate and House of Commons Act

Members of Parliament, as a rule, do not put themselves forward in the first instance as candidates for nomination by a political party; by the reverse process, political parties representing bodies of opinion throughout the country seek the man they think will attract the greatest confidence of the greatest number of people in the area and they call upon the electorate to elect him. He is not home free yet by any manner of means. He is then subject to an election campaign where he is presumably running against two or three others who are the best people their parties can find in that area. Only one can win; there are no second prizes in this business. Having gone through that process, he has no security of tenure. He is subject to re-election, usually at least every four years. Over the last period of years elections have been much more frequent than that. I have not served in this chamber for quite 20 years, yet I have had to win eight elections.

● (4:20 p.m.)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacLean: What I want to try to impress on the chamber is that we are not looking at a salary that can be accurately compared with a salary in any other field of endeavour. To begin with, the salary does not increase automatically as one gains experience and as one serves over a period. The fellow who has been here for 30 years, and since confederation several members have served here for 30 years, gets exactly the same as the fellow who was just elected in the last election. In other words, you do not get more simply because you have been here for a long time, or succeeded in staying here for a long time, unless you happen to be given the opportunity of taking on additional responsibilities or are made a cabinet minister. I shall say more about that later.

So, the ordinary criteria that apply to suitable remuneration in an ordinary career cannot validly be applied to the remuneration for serving in this place. It is difficult to know any field with which one can validly compare this place. It occurs to me that an allowance one is paid here is something like damages. When somebody, through negligence, causes an accident that destroys some person's ability to carry on an ordinary career and earn his ordinary means of livelihood, damages are paid. There is an element of this in the sessional allowances paid to Members of Parliament. Many members are pressured, I might say, into running for Parliament by their parties. They are elected because they are doing well in their careers. Usually at that time when they are making a good living and they should be consolidating their positions. Sometimes they serve here as members for one or two parliaments, and are defeated. When they go back they find that the business they had built up or the professional career they had established as an income producer has been virtually destroyed, and they must start over again at great financial sacrifice to themselves. That is why, basically, we must look at the salary in the first instance as a sessional allowance.

What is an appropriate figure? As I have said, it is difficult to be just in this matter. We should need the

[Mr. MacLean.]

judgment of Solomon to come down with a figure, applicable to every member of the House, that would be fair. It is difficult to do, since what we are trying to do applies to ourselves and our colleagues. Therefore, as the minister has said, we must try to remain somewhere between two levels, between the figure that would be so attractive that people would seek election to this place for monetary gain and the second, lower figure, below which Canadians except those of independent means would be completely precluded from serving in Parliament. I sincerely believe that we are well below that figure now and will be below it until this legislation is passed. The proof of that pudding is that there are a number of members in this House who, if the indemnity were not increased, could not in conscience continue in this House. They would have to refrain from running in the next election in the interests of maintaining their obligations to their dependents and to themselves.

As I said the other day, there are roughly three categories of members in this House: those of independent means; those who can serve here as a result of a combination of favourable circumstances; and those who, if the present situation were to continue, would have to discontinue membership in the House if they were to be fair to their families. On a different occasion the wife of a member made a caustic comment to me. She said, "You know, I worked for two or three years to put my husband through college. We had to pay for him for the last three years until he got his degree. I didn't expect that I would have to work for a number of years to put him through parliament as well."

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacLean: May I say a word about the amount that has been recommended by the minister. I ought to say at once, and I neglected to say this at the beginning of my remarks, that this is not a party, political matter and, therefore, I am not in a position to bind the stand of members of my party on this bill. Nor would I wish to do so even if I could. I think it is fair to say, nevertheless, that the vast majority of members of the official opposition agree with the proposition that, in principle, something must be done. Since we have gone through a long period of inflation and rising costs, I deplore the fact that there has been such a long period without adjustment. The longer such a period is, the more difficult it is to adjust the matter fairly and accurately.

I point out that when wages increase by 3 or 4 per cent per year, each year's increase is a percentage of the previous year's total. Wages, therefore, increase as compound interest increases, in geometric progression. If our salaries had been increased by 6 per cent every year for the last eight years, the amount would be \$19,000 and not \$18,000. If the increase had been 5 1/4 per cent for seven years in a row, the total amount of the increase would have been greater than 50 per cent of the original at the end of eight years. A 6 per cent increase every year for seven years is a little bit greater than a 50 per cent increase in a "slap". I am not putting these figures forward in justification of the figure suggested. I am pointing this out in passing.