

women who are sincere and conscientious in their desire to serve the public good.

Of course, there are exceptions; but there are exceptions in any group or any profession that you care to name. I think that on the whole this country has been well served by its public men and women. The fact remains that there is public skepticism about politics and politicians and I think we ought to be concerned about it. In a free society it is only natural that some people will disagree with particular politicians and will be disillusioned about some politicians and some political parties. That is what one can expect in a democratic society. But when the public becomes disillusioned about politics and politicians generally, then the basis upon which a free society is built is in real danger. If the public loses confidence and respect for parliamentary institutions, then I submit that our democratic system will not long survive.

I suggest that this cynicism and skepticism will not be dissipated by spurious arguments. The general public will tend to think like that homespun philosopher Josh Billings, who once said that when a fellow says it is not the money but the principle of the thing, it is the money! That is how I think the public will feel about some of the arguments to which we have been listening.

The hon. member for Windsor-Walkerville (Mr. MacGuigan) went to great lengths yesterday to say that we need to raise members' indemnities because this would prevent conflict of interest. I cannot imagine a more ridiculous argument, namely, that if we pay people more money, they are more likely to be honest. Some of the most dishonest transactions we have seen in this country and in other countries were committed by people who had the most wealth. There is no guarantee that you make people honest by giving them more money. People are honest because they have convictions and belief in their responsibilities in the public service.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): The hon. member for Windsor-Walkerville (Mr. MacGuigan) was dredging hard for that one.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): We also hear the argument that if we raise the indemnity substantially we will get a better class of member. First of all, I do not agree with that. Over the years we have had some very good members in this House and in other elected bodies across the country. I do not agree that by raising members' indemnities you can guarantee a better class of member. Even if one accepted that thesis, raising the indemnity will not change the class of members of this parliament. If it would improve the quality of the members we get, we should raise indemnities for the next parliament and see whether we get a better group than we have now—and I doubt very much whether that would be the case.

The government would be well advised to accept the motion moved yesterday by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) for a six months' hoist. I think a six months' hoist would give the government ample time to set up some mechanism similar to the Beaupré committee, or a committee headed by the Chief Justice, that is, an unbiased and unprejudiced committee to look into the matter of proper and adequate remunera-

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tion for members of parliament, senators, cabinet ministers and the Prime Minister. Then the whole question of what should be paid for our services would be placed in the hands of some other body rather than being left to us. Nothing could be more embarrassing than for members to have to decide on their own what they think they are worth. No other group in the economy has that privilege: other groups have to bargain for the wage return they will get. In some cases—as in the case of the longshoremen—when they cannot agree, parliament sends them back to work and allows an arbitrator to make the decision.

It would be a good idea to have an arbitrator in this instance. There is no hurry about this matter. This parliament will probably run for another 3½ years, so there is plenty of time to set up some mechanism for taking this whole question out of the hands of members of the House of Commons, letting somebody look into it, make recommendations and have those recommendations considered by the House as having been prepared and computed by an independent group. If the government is not going to do that and insists on proceeding with this legislation, then it seems to me that at the very least those who took on the job of being members in this thirtieth parliament ought to be prepared to work for the indemnity we knew was in effect when we were elected, and we should add to the indemnity—and to the indemnity alone—a cost of living index computed from July 8, 1974. That would mean we would receive the the salary that we contracted to work for, plus an increase to compensate us for the rising cost of living.

● (1530)

I think if we did that we would be setting an example for the rest of the people of Canada. I am sure no one need tell the government there are a great many collective agreements coming up for negotiation this year. Unless there is some measure of restraint, we will have a great deal of industrial unrest in this country. I can understand the government's concern. I can understand the concern of the Minister of Finance about what will happen, not only in terms of the days lost because of strikes but also because of the effect on our economy if exorbitant demands are made and accepted. I plead with the government: if it really wants to give leadership to the people at this time and to exercise restraint with regard to wage and salary demands, it should begin here. Sacrifices, like charity, should begin at home.

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak at this time for two reasons: first, to clarify the government's intention in respect of amendments to the bill in committee and, second, to urge that the bill be referred to the committee without delay so that the necessary amendments may be made and the House will be in a position to consider the bill in its amended form rather than in the version that is now formally before us.

The House will recall—it is hardly necessary for me to go over the history of this legislation—that in its original form the legislation provided for a flat 50 per cent increase in indemnity and allowances, without any escalation. It was a percentage that was to be flat and not to be changed during the course of the parliament. There was, however,