

Members' Salaries

neglected to do so, with the result that we now have a piece of legislation proposing very substantial increases.

An increase of 50 per cent is a very large increase in one's income. While the government has intimated that it may reduce this amount to 33 per cent when the bill is in committee, it is also true that it intends to put in the indexing feature, on the basis of the industrial composite index, to begin in this parliament rather than the next parliament. So that by the end of the thirtieth parliament members will be getting virtually what the government suggested in the legislation that was presented last December.

The government will find it very difficult to carry on its discussions with business, professional and labour groups, asking them for restraint in the matter of wages, if the House adopts the measure that is before it. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) is quoted as having said the other day that he is alarmed at the very substantial increases which in recent months have been granted workers in this country. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) is quoted as having said at the first ministers' conference this morning that Canada has one of the worst records of any country in terms of days lost because of strike action. Everyone deplores loss of time due to strike action, but the fact remains that workers in this country have found that the cost of living in many cases has risen more rapidly than the real income which they receive.

The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance have been meeting, and intend to continue meeting, with various groups in the economy in order to persuade them to exercise some restraint in their wage demands. I submit it will be increasingly difficult to do that when at the same time those who are being asked to be less demanding know perfectly well that the Prime Minister, cabinet ministers and members of this House, as well as members of the other place, have all voted themselves very hefty increases in their remuneration.

How do we answer the longshoremen who only a few days ago were sent back to work by order of this parliament? I voted for that legislation because I thought it was absolutely necessary to get the ports in western Canada operating and to get grain moving to world markets. But how do I explain to longshoremen in British Columbia that we sent them back to work, leaving their future income to the tender mercies of an arbitrator, while we in this parliament are so generous with regard to our own incomes?

How do I answer old age pensioners and recipients of veterans' pensions in my constituency and all across this country? These groups find themselves in very difficult circumstances. The incomes they are receiving are not adequate to meet even the barest of living requirements. The best proof of this is that several of the provincial governments have had to step in and enlarge the incomes of old age pensioners. Many provincial governments are now providing a guaranteed income up to as high as \$240 a month for old age pensioners because they cannot live on the present old age security pension even though it has a cost of living bonus attached to it. The provincial governments have had to subsidize out of their meagre revenues a payment to old age pensioners, the responsibility for whom lies primarily with the federal government.

[Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands).]

This parliament could long ago have substantially increased pensions paid to senior citizens and to veterans of this country. When we press the government with respect to this matter, the answer is always the same: the government cannot afford it. How will we explain to the old age pensioners and veterans that we cannot afford to give them more money but that we can afford to increase our own indemnities and travelling expenses?

I am afraid that as the government meets with the various segments of our economy and pleads with them to exercise restraint, the public is going to be very cynical. It is going to look upon members of parliament as taking the position: Don't do as I do, do as I tell you. It is going to remember the words of Emerson, who said, "What you are speaks so loudly, I cannot hear what you say".

I agree with my good friend and colleague, the hon. member for New Westminster (Mr. Leggatt), when he says that we should never put members of parliament in the position where the only persons who can run for office are those with a private income. That is true. There was a time, particularly in British history, when the only persons who could sit in the House of Commons were those who were wealthy and therefore they became a special group.

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It is equally true that members of parliament ought not to become, on the other hand, an elitist group forming part of the upper 5 per cent of the income earners of this country. We do not want members of parliament who have to be dependent upon private income: we want to make it possible for any citizen of this country to run for office and, if elected, to sit in this House of Commons. But we must be careful, at the same time, that those of us who sit in this House do not get out of touch with the people whom we represent; and that is a real danger. When you remember that in 1973 the average income of a family in Canada was \$6,358, you will see that the increase alone being proposed in this legislation will be more than the entire income upon which some families in this country had to live for a whole year.

I submit that the government had a real opportunity, an opportunity which it has missed, to give some leadership in this country when it started to ask people to exercise a measure of restraint. It seems to me that was a good time to have said, when requesting the people of Canada to tighten their belts, that we would begin with ourselves. We could have given leadership in this regard. But we are not giving it in the bill which is now before us—a bill which will make it virtually impossible for the government to make such a request of the people of Canada without being laughed out of court.

I sometimes wonder whether members of parliament realize the extent to which the public is becoming increasingly cynical about politics and politicians. This is particularly true of young people. I have occasion to address many groups of young people in universities and high schools, and their attitude today is that all those in politics are there for what they can get. I submit that is not true. I have said repeatedly to groups of young people that in the many years I have associated with politicians, I can honestly say that the great bulk of them are honest men and