

Members' Salaries

which no member in his right mind can seriously support. For that reason I can do no more than, having registered my vote on second reading against this bill, speak against it and vote against it on third reading.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I would be something less than human if I were not extremely grateful to the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) and to my leader, the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent) for their very kind words this afternoon. I extend my very warm thanks to both of them. It was a pleasure for me on Monday to join in the applause when, from the Chair, a welcome back to this House was extended to the right hon. member for Prince Albert. Some of us are happier than others to see him back.

We seem to be just about at the end of this debate, and as one who has spoken a number of times, I do not intend to make extended remarks at this stage. However, I would like to emphasize the point that the issue with respect to this pay raise bill is not whether as members of parliament we need an increase. The issue is not how our incomes compare with the incomes of other persons in Canada, be they in the public or the private sector. The issue at this time is the leadership that parliament gives to a country which is experiencing a time of trouble.

● (1620)

There is no denying the fact that we are in trouble, particularly in the economic sphere. If there is anything that is needed now from the leaders of the country it is leadership in the economic sphere, and we do not give that leadership if even before the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) brings in a budget and makes certain proposals, we protect ourselves by the kind of increase that is set out in Bill C-44.

I say again, Sir, that the issue is not whether we need more salary or more expense money; the issue is the kind of persons we are. Are we here to act on the basis of principle with respect to the needs and the problems of our people, or are we persons who, having come fresh from an election, are prepared to push through a measure that is in our own self-interest? Our job is at least to set an example, and this House is setting a wrong example if it gives final approval today to Bill C-44.

This was an offensive and indecent piece of legislation when it was brought in last December with the proposal for a 50 per cent increase in both our salaries and our allowances. I suggest, as I did yesterday, that in addition to being offensive and indecent this measure is now becoming a piece of dishonesty. The word has gone out that members of parliament were prepared to cut back from a 50 per cent increase to an increase of 33½ per cent. But there is added to that 33½ per cent increase retroactive to last July a formula under which, starting January 1, 1976, there will be compounding increases of 7 per cent per year, so that by the end of this parliament what we draw will be 63 per cent more than we are receiving at the present time.

This is not setting an example. That is not giving leadership. This is being dishonest with the people who sent us here to represent them.

[Mr. Cossitt.]

I have pointed out that there are a number of things about the legislation, especially in its amended form, that I dislike very much. I refer again in particular to the long battle that some of us have waged for pensions and other benefits, particularly pensions for senior citizens, retired public servants, retired armed forces personnel and RCMP personnel and for veterans generally, to be escalated in accordance with the rise in the standard of living. The best way to do that is to adopt the industrial composite index. But we have been turned down every time, Mr. Speaker.

All of these other groups have to settle for an escalation based on the consumer price index. The escalation is set up in such a way that all of these other groups are always behind—yes, Sir, even behind the rise in the cost of living. What the government is not prepared to give to everyone else, this House is prepared to take for its own members and the members of the other place, for this bill applies to our salaries and expense allowance the benefit of the industrial composite index which pensioners are denied.

Sir, I find this offensive, I find it indecent, I find it degrading to the status of those who were elected to do the business of the country and to meet the needs of our people. Those needs today are great, the problems to which we should be addressing ourselves are many, and I hope that even yet, especially after the appeal made today by the right hon. gentleman from Prince Albert, this House will agree that this matter should be put off at least for a while if hon. members are not prepared to turn it down completely.

I regret that so little has been said on the government side of the House in this debate. All day yesterday we had the report stage debate, and with the exception of the hon. member for York-Scarborough (Mr. Stanbury) who was critical of the bill, there were no speeches from the government side at all. There has been no defence yesterday or today of the terms of this bill. There is no effort even to fight back as we attack it. Is that parliament? Is that leadership? Is that the cut and thrust of debate, trying to decide what is best for the country? No, it is just a case of scores of members sitting and waiting for this extra money to fall into their laps, plus the escalation that will come in the years that lie ahead.

We presented several amendments yesterday. We tried to get the House to consider the retroactive date, the exact amount, the question of the future escalation, but all those amendments were turned down. This House seems to think of only one thing—when can this bill be got through, when are the cheques of hon. members to be fattened by the amounts set out in this legislation?

So, Mr. Speaker, I hope that even yet if this House is not prepared to say no to the bill, it will agree to put it off for a little while. That implies that in just a moment or two I am going to move an amendment generally known as the six months hoist. I do that today with particular emphasis because of the fact that the Minister of Finance has announced that he will be bringing down a budget within the next four weeks. Presumably, and I think it is a reasonable presumption, the speech attached to that budget will deal with the problem of inflation and what to do about wage levels and incomes policy.

An hon. Member: Don't hold your breath.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): My hon. friend