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HOME AFFAIRS.

by H. v. MAY.

In view of the considerable rise in the cost-of-living the Federal Council has proposed to Parliament that the subsistence allowances paid to the National Council deputies, whilst they are attending Sessions, should be raised, from the present fifty, to seventy-five francs. The Federal Council draws attention to the fact that members of the National Council, particularly those who have an independent profession or business, suffer considerable financial losses through their participation in the parliamentary sessions and in committee meetings, and also through the time taken up by studying files and by the elaboration of reports. It therefore considers that such losses should be made up for, even if only partially. The Swiss newspapers recognise the truth of these facts, but, nevertheless, a good many of them are of the opinion that the measure suggested is inopportune at the present moment.

The Liberal "Bund", of Berne, to begin with points out that the Swiss Parliament is the cheapest in Europe for the tax-payer. Its cost per annum and per capita of the population amounts to 44 centimes, as compared with 50 centimes in Great Britain and Fr.1.91 in France. At the same time the newspaper declares that in view of the constant warnings issued by the authorities against any increase in wages, because of the prevailing tendency towards inflation, it is psychologically inept when such a bad example is shown in high places.

The "Tages-Anzeiger" of Zurich also expresses itself in the same sense. The paper writes: For us it is a real puzzle, why just that very time when sermons on economy are being delivered to the people, should be considered to be the right moment to propose to the Members of Parliament, publicly, that they should act in a contrary way to the exhortations of the Federal Council, and this in their own financial interests. This is really the limit, as obviously no consideration is being given to the comprehension and the feelings of the electorate. We have nothing more to say [the paper goes on] in regard to the material grounds for the measure that is being planned. These may be looked upon as being important, and they may not, but no one can contest the fact that the time chosen for such an announcement is highly unsuitable and that everyone feels that they must agree with the natural feelings of the people, and say: Only not just at the present time!

The Conservative "Vaterland", of Lucerne, connects with a possible increase in subsistence allowances the expectation that the deputies will look upon this as being a spur, carrying with it the obligation of a stronger political responsibility. The paper thinks that a certain division is to be observed at the present time between Parliament and the People, and avails itself of this opportunity to call upon the Members of Parliament to strive, once more, to be more fully conscious of their responsibility for political events and their duty as leaders.

The Independent "Tribune de Genève" proceeds to examine how many so-called "self-employed" members of the National Council come into question with regard to having their income losses covered by means of the parliamentary subsistence allowances.

The newspaper declares that this applies to only one out of every five, that is to say, relatively few. The paper, however, has not undertaken this enquiry for the purpose of working against an increase in these rates. Rather does it wish to use the results of this enquiry in order to draw attention to the fact that the large majority of our parliamentarians are "career" politicians and wage-earners or salaried persons, whereas the "self-employed" or independent income earners form only a small minority. According to the paper this fact is to be regretted, for professional men, for example medical practitioners, are in touch with all classes of the population and are specially suited to represent all those who are, generally, hardly ever thought about, at the Council's meetings. Should — so the paper concludes — a raising of the parliamentary subsistence allowances be conducive to attracting more independent professional men to Parliament our democracy would take a big step forward.

The "Nouvelle Revue de Lausanne" is unquestionably in favour of an increase in the subsistence allowance of the members of the National Council. The newspaper declares that compensation of this kind is in no way a *salary* paid for the time which the deputies devote to the service of their country. The deputy fulfils his mission *gratuitously*, and finds his wage in the honour paid him by the conferring of a mandate upon him and in the satisfaction felt by him in the carrying out of his duty. The newspaper looks upon these allowances as being much more a contribution towards the considerable expense incumbent on a Member of Parliament when performing his office. Without it being necessary for him to indulge in any luxurious way of living, it is, nevertheless, necessary for a Member of Parliament to maintain a certain standard which corresponds to his dignity as a representative of the people. And, in conclusion, the paper observes that in this case one must avoid any of that pettiness which only too often is characteristic of us Swiss.

OUR NEXT ISSUE.

Our next issue will be published on Friday, July 12th 1957. We take this opportunity of thanking the following subscribers for their kind and helpful donations over and above their subscription: J. A. Steiner, J. W. Frick, H. Andrea, J. Steiner, O. Wuest, A. O. Bucher, Th. Siegfried, M. Grether (Basle), Mrs. F. Schreck, W. B. Sigerist, F. Streit.

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