

POLITICIANS' SALARIES

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"THE CHRISTIAN FAITH"

Every so often politicians receive a rise in salary, and the complaints about this begin. Their critics are vociferous, and the more conscience stricken members talk about giving the extra back or giving it away to charity. The public is quick to notice that the extra amount would almost on its own be enough for a person to live on. There are many sneers about hypocrisy and greed, and the press has a field day. On the other hand the politicians themselves self-righteously defend their position with various arguments.

Now I don't know the rights and wrongs of all this. How much is a politician worth? When all cynicism is put aside, it must be agreed that their job, if done sincerely, is a very difficult and demanding one. Furthermore there is always the danger of losing the job after only three years. Nonetheless some of the arguments that are brought forward to support the rise seem so puerile that it is worth refuting them.

One of the most common is that we need to have the best men in parliament, and we will only get them by paying top salaries. Now please put aside the temptation to laugh at this: after all most of us have never met a politician, and although it is commonly remoured that all these previous pay rises have not produced the top men, we cannot say this for sure. What we can say, however, is that the argument that the best people will be attracted by a high salary is fatuous.

After all, who are the top politicians? Surely they will be found amongst those whose motive in belonging is service - service to the community. Take a big lawyer. He might be earning \$100,000 per annum. To become a politician he might have to halve his salary to a mere \$50,000. Would a good man hesitate? Would he hesitate if he had the interests of the community at heart? The best leaders, in the true sense of the word, would serve for nothing, let alone \$50,000.

Of course I know the argument that working class politicians cannot afford to serve for nothing. It would be a very impressive argument if we did not see the representatives of the workers voting themselves salaries, allowances and superannuation which took them out of the working class forever.

But let's not fool ourselves! This is a democracy, and we are represented by men and women who are like us. The attitudes in Canberra are Australian attitudes - which one of us can resist feeling angry if we hear of someone else getting more money than us for the same job? Which of us is in business to serve others? It is we who are corrupted by greed, and the accusations we so carelessly fling at others rebound on our own heads.

A society which has deliberately turned its back on God's standards cannot expect to be happy or peaceful. Greed offends God and it is the very opposite of love. Alas! in this respect our politicians are just the mirror-image of ourselves!

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