**THE SENTINEL GAZETTE**

**Opinion Column: Two Ways of Seeing**

## PARLIAMENTARY SALARIES

### By John News (Writing from Llançà, Catalonia)

THE ANCHOR

Reflecting on the state of contemporary European democracies from Llançà, one cannot ignore the growing rift between citizens and their elected representatives. A primary driver of this cynicism is the financial architecture of legislative office. When a parliamentary salary—often exceeding 100,000 euros annually when including tax-free allowances and expenses—dramatically surpasses what an individual could ever hope to earn in the private market, political office ceases to be a temporary public service. It becomes an economic life raft.

The argument for high, non-discretionary parliamentary compensation is historically rooted in the defense of democratic independence. As Alexander Hamilton argued in *The Federalist Papers*, a representative whose financial survival depends on external patrons or private wealth is inherently vulnerable to corruption, pressure, and undue influence. A generous salary was meant to ensure that citizens of modest means could serve without financial ruin and remain beholden only to the public interest.

The core structural flaw in our current political system is the brutal economic asymmetry between political compensation and normal professional life. Consider a primary school teacher, a nurse, or an administrative worker who steps into parliament: their income suddenly triples or quadruples. Over two or three legislative terms, their household structure, mortgages, and family commitments adapt to this elevated standard of living. When the time comes to leave, returning to their former job means facing an abrupt 60% or 70% reduction in income—an economic shock that very few middle-class families can comfortably absorb.

This financial trap perverts internal party democracy and institutional courage. When leaving politics implies economic displacement, deputies cannot afford to dissent from party orthodoxy, challenge leadership decisions, or vote according to their personal conscience. Party discipline becomes absolute not out of ideological conviction, but out of absolute fear of returning to the ordinary labour market. To protect democratic integrity, parliamentary salaries must be dignified yet moderate, reviewed by independent bodies, and paired with realistic, transitional professional support rather than permanent economic privileges.

THE HORIZON

To suggest that reducing politicians' pay or tying salaries strictly to market averages will restore public trust is to misunderstand the fundamental nature of democratic government. While the socio-economic distance between representatives and the electorate is a genuine concern, turning public office into a poorly compensated or financially risky endeavour carries severe structural dangers for democratic representation itself.

In his seminal 1919 lecture *Politics as a Vocation*, Max Weber drew a crucial distinction between living "for" politics and living "from" politics. Weber warned that if state positions are not sufficiently remunerated, political power inevitably concentrates in the hands of the independently wealthy—the plutocrats and rentiers who can afford to serve without relying on a salary. Adequate parliamentary pay is precisely what allows working-class individuals, teachers, nurses, and civil servants to enter parliament without sacrificing their family's basic financial security.

The predicament of the teacher or nurse who struggles to leave politics is real, but the solution cannot be to lower political salaries to match underpaid public service jobs. If serving in parliament carries a heavy financial penalty or professional stagnation compared to upper-level private careers, qualified professionals from law, medicine, engineering, or business will simply refuse to enter public life altogether. Parliament would then be left exclusively to young party apparatchiks who have never held a job outside politics, or wealthy individuals for whom a salary is irrelevant.

Lowering parliamentary income or creating economic uncertainty upon leaving office does not eliminate professional politicians; it merely impoverishes the talent pool of our democracy. The challenge is not to degrade the compensation of our representatives, but to build transparent institutions that guarantee fair remuneration during service, enforce strict cooling-off periods, and establish professional reintegration mechanisms that allow citizens to serve their country and return to their vocations without fear of financial ruin.

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