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## Editorial

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### Would It Help to Cut Their Pay?

There have been attempts last month to introduce into the Community a variant of a well known, but rarely used procedure in the British House of Commons, namely to vote to reduce a Minister's salary by one penny, thereby obliging the unfortunate miscreant to resign (not that resignation is a Christian virtue of which many Ministers in the United Kingdom can be said to have a surfeit). The time has come, so many in the European Parliament feel, to use the salary weapon in order to concentrate the Commission's mind in the desired direction. Accordingly, the October part-session saw moves to freeze certain amounts in Chapter 100 of the Budget (the reserve), permitting its release only when the necessary conditions are fulfilled.

It is, of course, the Council which fixes the salaries of the President, Vice-Presidents and members of the Commission, not the Parliament, so the effectiveness of this weapon will to a large extent depend on the Council. As the salaries form part of compulsory expenditure (necessarily flowing from existing legal obligations), it will be the Council which has the last word. But there is no doubt that the Parliament is

sending an extraordinarily powerful political signal with this action. If the ploy (and it undoubtedly is a negotiating ploy) becomes effective, it might offer a political solution to the cumbersome censure procedure at present in place. Thus a frankly incompetent member of the Commission could well be brought to book by the use of an individual resolution reducing that person's pay by 1 Belgian Franc. There is no reason why such a convention could not develop, given the current penchant for the *Mmodus Vivendi*, the Interinstitutional Agreement and the Joint Declaration as various forms of soft law. Perhaps British constitutional conventions may offer an alternative to the cumbersome formalities presently available.

Might this not be taken further? Might Ministers resign when constantly criticised by judges on the ground of abuse of power? But perish the thought, a member of the Commission might have to resign if a dirty deal done were to be annulled by the Court, or persons who had perhaps acted on a Commissioner's behalf might not be promoted so swiftly. Perhaps after all it is just as well that the *sans culottes* have not yet developed wings . . .

*Laurence Gormley*