

Mr President, the reason for this debate on our agenda is at the insistence of the Christian Democrats and the Conservatives in the EPP and of the Socialist and Social Democrats in the PES. There is no need for us to be having this debate today. My Group is in favour of equal conditions for all members in a members' statute. This motion makes it harder, makes it more difficult, for us to achieve such a statute.

If the motion proposed by Mr Crespo and Mr Poettering is adopted it will not progress in our discussions with the Council. Those two gentlemen gave you a mandate for exploratory discussions with Council and yet their parties are now wanting to force a point on Mr Rothley's opinion before giving Parliament the chance to consider the outcome of your discussions.

Mr Rothley's opinion wants to include in the Members' statute his views of primary law, such as immunities and privileges which require ratification by national Parliaments. The message about reform that they are sending to the Council is 'take it or leave it.' The message that they are sending to MEPs who want reform is 'forget it.'

My party's joint resolution with the GUE and the Greens calls for a common statute, agreed with the national governments and Council, giving equality of treatment for MEPs and transparency in our allowances. And my message to individual members of the EPP and PSE, many of whom will be laughing all the way to the bank if they stop reform, is this: have you no self-respect? Have you no concern for the reputation of this House? I am accused of Mr Rothley's press release of being unserious and making dishonest accusations. Mr Rothley, I take serious the accusations of dishonesty made by citizens against us. Mr Baron Crespo accuses me of heaping invective on the Socialists. I am heaping invective on you. Why are so many of your members, including all of your British members, going to support our motion in the vote tomorrow? The answer is that you heap invective on yourselves, and you deserve it. Moreover, however, you heap invective on those of who recognise the public concerns, who admit that the expenses regime is unjustifiable and who seek to introduce the highest standards of management into this House.

Mr President, we abuse the taxpayer at our peril, and we demean democratic politics through not reforming. And in calling on members to support the resolution put forward by three Groups, I call on them to reject the description of politicians put forward in the immortal words of the poet Belloc when he wrote:

*with pomp and ridiculous display
the politician's corpse was borne away
while those around him carped and slanged
I wept, I would have seen him hanged.*