

Income Tax Act

This is the complete opposite of the principle of bringing fairness to the tax law, because all it does is provide an additional basic exemption to all workers whether or not they have any definable expenses in the course of earning a living. Here the government is advancing exactly the same arguments that Hon. Walter Harris used to advance in the House, and they have the gall to label this a document for tax reform.

In 1956 the Minister of Finance admitted this discrimination and said the government would look into it. Apparently Liberal administrations have been looking into it ever since, and this one has come up with exactly the same answer that was given to members of the House in 1956 so far as the principle involved is concerned. That is why I submit that any suggestion advanced in this House or elsewhere that this proposal in the White Paper is designed to meet the situation outlined by the hon. member for Vegreville in his speech is at complete variance with the fact.

All this nonsense about the millions of taxpayers involved and about not keeping records has nothing to do with the kind of situation the hon. member for Vegreville is outlining in his resolution, or the kind of special expenses incurred by certain workers because their employment requires them to live away from home or to travel long distances from their normal place of residence. These are the kinds of expenses that self-employed people are allowed to deduct. Self-employed people are not allowed to deduct the bus fare from their home to the office, and neither should any other working people be allowed to deduct these expenses. Presumably these expenses which everyone has—we all have to eat, have clothing and shelter—can be covered in a general basic exemption.

Let us not confuse these two issues. To do so simply makes nonsense of any suggestion that we are moving toward tax reform in the area covered by the resolution of the hon. member for Vegreville. This matter would not involve millions of taxpayers. It would not involve any more difficulty so far as administration is concerned than administration of the tax law for the self-employed farmer, fisherman or any one of a dozen other categories of people, be they professionals or tradesmen. I wish that for once the government could get this simple proposition through its head. Let us not have any more of the kind of nonsense that is peddled with the white paper, about the government being the great

white father and saying, "We are going to be very big hearted and allow you an extra \$150 a year." This is not what it seems.

I submit, Mr. Speaker—I mention it for the benefit of the hon. member for York North who participated in the debate—that this proposal will increase discrimination against working people so far as expenses are concerned because it is based on a percentage of income principle. It has no relationship whatever to the amount of the expenses. In other words, as long as one is discussing income below the ceiling, in effect the more poorly paid worker is charged more for the expenses he incurs than the person in a higher income bracket. Is this equity? I suppose it is the Liberal concept of a just society.

I hope the hon. member for York North will make an attempt at least to consider my argument. He is a member of the august Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs, to which I have not ventured to aspire. Nevertheless, when it comes down to these fundamental, practical questions of equity and tax law it seems to me that one does not have to move too far into the ethereal realm of high finance to be able to understand simple economic justice for working people.

I am very happy that the hon. member for Vegreville has recognized the existence of this problem and has taken the initiative to put this resolution on the Order Paper. I hope he will continue to pursue this matter. I think there is a growing disposition in various quarters of the House to recognize that this is a real problem of discrimination and that it can be dealt with in a sane, practical manner. We no longer need to be fooled by the kind of smokescreen of administrative difficulties that has been drawn across this issue over the years in many sessions of Parliament.

• (5:40 p.m.)

Mr. P. M. Mahoney (Calgary South): Mr. Speaker, this is the second occasion on which a member of the official opposition by private member's resolution has brought to this House matters that are basically under consideration in the Finance Committee study of the white paper. On the previous occasion resolution No. 12, in the name of the hon. member for Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain (Mr. Southam), dealt with similar matters—basically, the travelling expenses incurred by certain categories of employees. With some regret at that time I found myself unable to support the motion, principally because due