

*Senate and House of Commons Act*

There are two in particular. One is the fact that the increase to be provided by this bill is to be retroactive to October 8, 1970. Like other members of this House, I have a great deal to do with workers in the private sector and in the public sector who try to get increases and try to get some retroactivity. But how seldom they get it! I am also aware of the fact that the Canadian Legion and other veterans' organizations asked that recent increases in veteran's pensions and allowances be made retroactive a year or at least a few months. But, no; when the legislation was brought in there was no retroactivity in it. The same is true about old age pensions and about many of the things we provide for others. We provide no retroactivity for all these other groups, but in this bill we take for ourselves the special privilege of making this very large increase retroactive to October 8, 1970.

The other element of special privilege in this legislation is the continuing in effect of the principle of a portion of our income being called expense allowance and being made tax free. The one thing in the Beaupré report which had wide approval was the recommendation that the special privilege of a tax-free allowance should end. Instead of ending it, this bill entrenches it by raising the tax-free amount from \$6,000 to \$8,000 a year. I suggest if we continue in this direction it will be even more difficult, if ever Parliament wants to do it, to abolish that special privilege. My third reason for opposing this bill is, as I have said, these two elements of special privilege that are contained in it, retroactivity and freedom from income tax. I have had letters from persons who, whether I agree with them or not, expressed no objection to an increase in the salaries of Members of Parliament, but all of them object most strongly to our providing ourselves with freedom from income tax on what is part of our income, especially since no such privilege is granted to them.

● (3:10 p.m.)

The fourth thing that I wish to say—and it is something that I have had occasion to say on a number of times in various debates in the House—is that in my view the problem that besets our society the most is that of inequality and of wide differences between the living standards of those at the bottom and those at the top. This is a problem in our Canadian society and it is a problem in our world. My fear is that this is the kind of thing that could bring down our society and that could tear our world apart. I believe we must move in the direction of greater equality in living standards; we have to level things up. One does not level things up by following this percentage rule and always providing bigger increases for those at the top than we provide for those at the bottom. We boast of the fact that welfare standards and minimum wages are higher today than they were a few years ago, but the living standards of those at the top are so much higher, the gap is so much wider, that in a psychological sense the poverty of those at the bottom is even worse.

This applies, as I said, in the world at large, and it applies in Canada. I think that the effort to level things

up and to achieve some sort of equality has to begin with some of those at or near the top. It is not good enough just to tell those down at the bottom that they must be satisfied with a minimum wage of \$1.75 an hour. It is not good enough for us to tell those who sit at the collective bargaining table that they must be satisfied with lower wages than they want, all of this being said in the name of restraint and in the name of keeping the economy going. If we believe that there should be some sort of approach toward equality, toward solving the problem of wide differences, those of us who are up the scale a bit are the people who should say so. I think we should be giving a lead, and I think this responsibility rests upon us as Members of Parliament even more than it does upon the professional and the business community, because we are the people who have come here to be the representatives of the Canadian people. We are the people who should be giving a lead. Therefore, I think we should say no to the proposed boost in our take home pay which this bill provides.

The fifth and final thing that I want to say may perhaps be somewhat personal. It is something that I had occasion to say in the standing committee to which this bill was referred, but I feel I must say it again. A good deal has been said about the comparison between our salary levels and the salary levels of senior public servants, of executives, of deputy ministers, and so on, and the argument is made—and I understand and respect the argument—that our salaries should somehow be comparable to theirs so that our working relationship with them will be an appropriate one. I do not accept the premise of that suggestion, namely that we have been hired to do a job. We hire public servants for that purpose and we pay the rates that attach to those jobs. But we come here rather as representatives to speak for the people whom we represent. To put it in the plainest language that I can, even though it may be somewhat personal, I am far more concerned about my relationship with the people whom I represent than I am with my relationship with the deputy ministers or the senior public servants who may, in a sense, be sitting across the table from me.

Of course, the argument can be won for a pay increase if you trot out comparisons, at least if you trot out comparisons with senior public servants. You cannot win that argument if you mention figures in relation to what we have done for old age pensioners, for people on the minimum wage, for war veterans, and so on. But speaking for myself may I say that it means far more to me to have the people in Winnipeg North Centre feel that I am their representative, that there is some relationship and some rapport between them and me, than it does for me to have enough salary so that I can say that I am the equal of some level in the federal public service. I do not need money to be their equal, but I do want the feeling that I do represent the people who sent me here.

Therefore, for these five reasons, if I may recapitulate them, having kept my promise not to take my full 40 minutes, I am opposed to this bill. I think in the first place that, like others, we should sharpen our pencils and balance our budgets rather than just vote ourselves an