

hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. The House has rarely witnessed a performance by a member, on any issue, such as that displayed by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. That hon. member was deeply moved and deeply committed in respect of this issue, and in respect of which he so ably demonstrated his knowledge of the rules and procedures of this House. His contribution grows out of a basic commitment to equality and a basic sense of redistributing income in our country in an equitable way. Arising from that commitment was an opposition to an unjustified level of increase as provided for in this bill.

The hon. member added to his contribution a profound knowledge of the rules of this House. This combination of commitment and knowledge of procedure enabled him to provide us with what I think is one of the finest contributions ever made to any debate in the history of this House. I want again to pay tribute to that exceptionally fine member of parliament.

The NDP has opposed this bill basically because the amounts of money are simply too much. That is really what is at stake here. If we take the increase for members as a whole we find that we are going to get an additional \$8,600 in one shot. I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, and hon. members of the House, to keep in mind that the average income of the average family, not just the poor families in Canada, was below \$8,600 last year. Here we are providing ourselves with an increase in one lump sum that exceeds the total income of the vast majority of the population of this country.

Surely this is what is moving the people of our country from coast to coast to a profound opposition to the MPs' salary bill. It is not that the people of Canada object to any increase. The people of Canada at all income levels were quite prepared to say that members of parliament who have not had an increase since 1971 are entitled to some reasonable increase. What they are not prepared to concede, and what my party is not prepared to go along with, is that we are entitled to an increase of \$8,600 across the board, an increase which, I repeat, exceeds the total level of income of the vast majority of Canadians.

It is on that general ground of inequity that the NDP in this debate has opposed the bill. We opposed the original proposal before Christmas, the proposal brought back some 48 hours later, and we oppose the final version of this bill we are now debating.

It has been our position that members of parliament should set some kind of example in terms of the distribution of income in Canada. It has also been our position that an increase was justified, but only an increase on that part of our income other than the non-taxable portion. That is, we take the position that an increase is justified in respect of the \$18,000 but not in respect of the \$8,000. We take that position for two reasons. We want the increase to be a reasonable one which bears directly and exclusively on the increase in the cost of living since 1971.

We have put forward arguments showing that the expenses the \$8,000 tax exempt portion was intended to cover have been provided for in recent years by other means at public expense. These means were outlined by myself at earlier stages of the debate, as well as by other

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members of my party. There is no justification at all for an increase in that \$8,000 part of our income. We are prepared to say that an increase of the \$18,000, equivalent to the increase in the cost of living, would be justified, but even that, from the point of view of equity, could be argued against.

We believe in the principle, which I think would find acceptance in the country, that the people in Canada who are at the upper income levels, and have been for many years, should be prepared to say they have had enough and will wait for any future increase until the average and the poor of the country catch up. If we apply a cost of living increase only in respect of the people at our income level then at least we will not experience a decline in our standard of living, and we will be able to go on living as well with our families as we have in the past, and the benefits accruing from the increase in our productivity can be passed on to the people in the lower income levels. In this way we can provide an opportunity for the poor to get out of that status of poverty in which so many people are living today.

It is the failure on the part of members in supporting this bill that has caused my party to be most disturbed. We are not indulging in self-denial, but we want to indulge in some self-restraint in the hope of setting an example to the people in private industries and at other government levels. Those of us in the upper income positions who are, relatively speaking, wealthy, ought not to be getting more and more as long as we have so many people living in poverty, and as long as we have an inequitable distribution of income.

The second point that has led us to oppose this bill is related in part to the same point. It relates to the government's incomes policy, or the so-called consensus. This has been labelled differently at different times. We know we are to have a budget before the end of May, and we know the government has been meeting with representatives of the trade union movement, representatives of provincial governments, and representatives of the private sector.

● (1600)

We know the government has made some proposals in respect of some kind of an incomes policy. It has been difficult to obtain details of those proposals, but there are certain basic assumptions one must make about them. I should like to suggest an assumption I made. If there is to be substance to this incomes policy it must set a limit in terms of guidelines in respect of increases in salaries which it thinks will be acceptable to the economy as a whole.

Probably the government will take a certain percentage level of income and tie all future incomes to that percentage and/or it will take some fixed amount. It might say that there may be increases up to a certain level, and place a ceiling on an appropriate dollar figure, or it might even have a floor level and say that no increases should fall below a certain amount. If that kind of policy is to have any relevance at all as a guidelines instrument in Canada, it cannot provide guidelines that would establish within their framework this kind of increase that the members of parliament are now voting for themselves.

The government cannot say to the people of Canada as a