

Senate and House of Commons Act

68 of *Hansard* for the date I have indicated which was very true. These were his words:

I have often mentioned the responsibility of the more affluent segments of our society toward the less privileged ones. The majority of us have already satisfied our right to a minimum standard of satisfactory living. It is those who have not who need government help.

On another occasion, on February 14, 1969, as recorded in *Hansard* at page 5524, he said it is useless to solve certain other problems unless we are prepared to do something about, and I quote his exact words: "the intolerable conditions of poverty in which too many Canadians now live".

I confess that when I heard those words from the Prime Minister in the first session after he became the Prime Minister of this country, I dared to believe, in spite of things I had said about him in the election campaign, that maybe he was interested in the problem of poverty in Canada and maybe he was prepared to do something about it. I liked in particular his assertion that the majority of us have already satisfied our right to a minimum standard of satisfactory living and it is those who have not who need government help. It has not worked out that way, and it is in light of that position, and any one of us can spell it out with examples, that I object very strongly to the government asking us to improve our own position when we have done so little to combat poverty or the trials of the poor in this country.

I know one of the answers to that argument is that if we did not get this pay raise, and if the full amount of money it will cost to provide it were divided among the poor it would be only a few cents per person or per family, therefore it is argued that there is no point in doing it. I know the contention that if we are free from want and worry we can do a better job for those who are in need. Things are not working that way and I want to say, speaking for myself as all of us are doing in this debate, that I think the thing which is most wrong in our society and in our world is the ever-widening gap between the poor and the affluent. This is the thing that is wrong in our world, even with all we have done by way of assistance to developing countries. The gap in the standard of living between two-thirds of the world's population and the other one-third is wider than it ever was. If this sort of thing goes on, our world could fall apart.

I say the same thing about Canadian society. We are not going to have a bright and hopeful future if we continue to increase the amount of money the poor have by only a little and increase the amount that those in the upper bracket have by ever so much more. In my view this concept of doing things on a percentage basis is basically wrong. What we have to do if we are going to solve the problem of poverty is to challenge the power structure in this country and challenge the government and society as a whole on the idea that it is proper to have an economic hierarchy in which every time there is any little improvement at the bottom there will be a large improvement at the top.

I assert that the time has come—and maybe that time has been coming over and over again in the past, but it is

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

the present we have to concern ourselves about—for some of those who enjoy a higher standard of living than is the average in this country to say this has gone far enough. It is time to cut down this practice of the percentage principle and do something to level things up by raising those who are at the bottom of the economic scale rather than doing things that keep widening the gap.

That is what is wrong with this bill to increase our total take-home pay but which pays no attention to the basic problem facing this country, namely that of solving the problem of poverty. The Prime Minister talked in his first session in that capacity as though he was concerned about this. For a while there was even talk about a war on poverty but that soon got lost. We have seen an interesting development in another place that we are not supposed to talk about around here where a committee got into trouble because some of the people working for that committee wanted to attack the power structure and attack poverty itself. The fact is that is what we have to do.

I submit that by going along with the idea that those at the top should continue to get increases of as high a percentage as those at the bottom get, or even higher, we are widening the gap. This means that we are doing a disservice not only to the poor but a disservice to society as a whole. At some point we have to begin to show that our main objective and purpose is in the direction of equity; that our main purpose and objective must be a levelling upwards for those who are at the bottom and, for that reason, we who are at or near the top must hold the line where we are. That is what we ought to do. This is my basic philosophical approach to this whole problem and that is why I think we should let our position stay as it is. We should give a lead and some sense of direction to the country as a whole by doing just this, and that means saying no to this bill.

The last speaker pointed out that if we do not hold the line but rather vote for a 50 per cent increase in our salaries or a 44 per cent in our total take-home pay that certainly will be taken by all sorts of elements in our society as a lead. I suggest that in a year or two inflation will be out of hand again, and that the gap which concerns me will get wider. We have to start narrowing that gap. It is not up to someone else. It is up to us.

It is easy to say the other fellow should make the first move, but we are the leaders of the country. We are the people who represent the 20-odd million Canadians in Canada and we are here to give direction to the kind of society we should have. I think we can give that lead by saying no for ourselves to any further improvement in our take-home pay until something really substantial has been done to improve the position of all those who are at the lower end of the scale.

• (12:40 p.m.)

I could, of course, cite examples which have been cited a number of times. There has been that very slight increase in the basic old age pension bringing it up to \$80 a month and increases in veterans pensions and allowances which were far less than should have been made. In addition, there is the heavy pressure that is being put