

ship. You do not give leadership by having people who are in the elite position of having more income than 95 per cent of the people we are supposed to represent.

One of the reasons why some of us have come to this place is precisely because of the gross inequalities of income in Canada. It is not the first time I have referred to the speech of the Minister of National Health and Welfare. It was a good speech, and the points he made about the need to ameliorate these inequalities are exceedingly well taken. Maybe it takes time. I do not like saying that, because I do not think it should take the decades it does to make changes. Surely until we have brought some of these others up, we who are already in the top 5 per cent of families in Canada should not, by this bill, be putting ourselves in a still smaller group, up into 3 per cent or 2 per cent category.

In my book an egalitarian society is a goal to aim at—and not just a goal for the year 2000 or 2100, but is a goal to aim at now. One of the troubles, and it is well pointed out in the speech of the Minister of National Health and Welfare, is that even though there have been increases for those at the bottom as well as those at the top, the differences still persist. I insist that a society that has inequalities of that sort will not survive as a strong, healthy society worth the effort that it takes to maintain.

I plead, Mr. Speaker, that we not waste our time talking about how much it costs us to maintain two homes or put children through school, or the cost of sending out Christmas cards. Let us not have anyone else raise the argument that we need an increase in pay so that we can send out Christmas cards. A person cannot get much smaller than that. I say let us not worry about our position as individuals, let us get our eye on the ball and think of the thing that is important, namely, that we in this place are here to give leadership to the country. We will not be giving leadership by taking steps to increase that inequality by putting ourselves in a still higher bracket so far as the incomes of the families of Canada are concerned.

● (2050)

We had this bill before the House before Christmas and the government wanted to get it through at that time, but it did not succeed. Now that it has been brought back again I suppose the government has a stake in the matter and it has to get it through to save its face. Surely debates in this place are not in vain, and surely if some of us, like the hon. member for Davenport, have points that we feel are valid, they should be listened to and considered. If some of us, even though we are only 16 down in this corner, feel that this matter is so serious it should be looked at more thoroughly, we should take the time to do so.

I referred to us in this corner as being 16. I am aware of the fact, and not ashamed at all of it, that two or three of my colleagues may not be with the rest of us in voting against the bill when the vote comes. I am aware that even those who may accept the bill are very much opposed to some features of it. Even if it is only a handful of us who feel as strongly as we do about the ethics and morality of this question, and as strongly as we do about our responsibility in providing leadership, we urge that some attention be paid to the remarks we are trying to make.

Members' Salaries

One of the other arguments that continues to be advanced around here is that we need higher pay in order to attract better people to this House of Commons.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I believe there was an interjection which I did not catch. I imagine it was delightful, but I will not worry about it. I have heard that argument certainly during every one of the five pay battles I have been through, and I do not see that the members of the House of Commons today are that much better than King, Ralston, Ilsley, Woodsworth, Bennett, Graydon, Coldwell and others who were here when the pay was \$4,000 a year for members, with no expense allowances! I do not see that much of a difference, and I think we would actually be better members if we had a little more awareness of the economic problems facing the people of this country. We certainly will not have that awareness if we give ourselves the massive increase suggested in this bill.

I see you are about to get to the edge of your chair, Mr. Speaker, and I know what that means. I shall not force you to get up, but rather I shall sit down in less than a minute. I would plead with this House that it give more thought to this measure, and that it give the leadership the country wants at this time but which it is not getting from this place if parliament rushes through this bill.

To give the House a little more time to think the matter over, I move, seconded by the hon. member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow):

That Bill C-44 be not now read the second time but that it be read the second time this day six months hence.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. John Gilbert (Broadview): Mr. Speaker, I support Bill C-44.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gilbert: I hope that the amended form is that version set forth by the parliamentary secretary and the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp).

I think the people of Canada should be very proud of the NDP. On December 10 when this bill was introduced there were certain unfavourable feelings regarding its contents. Many felt that its terms were unconscionable. The NDP has made us look at the bill a second time, and this has given the public an opportunity to scrutinize it, analyze it, and comment on it.

Out of the clash of ideas comes a certain wisdom, and what has come forward in the spirit of compromise is a fair and reasonable increase, with an escalation clause that should effectively stop pay bills from coming into the House on a regular basis.

The NDP, as a socialist party, is not confined to a welfare party. Its members believe in individual dignity and justice, and that every person in Canada is entitled to a decent living, which includes the right of employment at a fair and reasonable salary or wage, the right to housing, the right to medicare, the right to education, and the right to a clean environment.