

Members' Salaries

sons receive. I received a memo from one of my colleagues in the House which shows what top public servants receive and the increases they have had, and I am reminded of what teachers, longshoremen and all sorts of other people receive. I am not concerned about the people who make as much as I do, or more. There are not very many in the latter case. We are among the top 2 per cent or 3 per cent of the income earners of Canada. Statistics vary; sometimes it is the top 1½ per cent and sometimes the top 2 per cent, but certainly we are in the top 3 per cent or 4 per cent.

Mr. Sharp: We're in the top ten.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): The President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp) says "the top ten." I question his figure, but I am prepared to accept it. If we are already in the top 10 per cent, we have no right to be improving our economic position at this time. I am not concerned about the relationship between what I earn and what is earned by others receiving as much or more. I am concerned about the 90 per cent or 95 per cent of the Canadian people who earn less than I, particularly the 40 per cent or 50 per cent who earn a great deal less than those who make up this House of Commons and the other place. For us at this time, when there is so much need and distress in the country, to be improving a position which is already very good, in my view is not the mark of responsible statesmanship and I hope we will give some more thought to it.

I want also to say that I think the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) are right when they complain about the inequalities in our society and in our world. One of the best statements about world inequality yet made was made a few weeks ago overseas by the Prime Minister. One of the best statements on the evils of inequality in our Canadian society was made by the Minister of National Health and Welfare in Toronto last fall, and he made another good speech a few days ago in Toronto on the necessity of our doing something about poverty in this country. That is what I came to parliament for, more than three decades ago. It has been the concern of my life to minimize the inequalities, to move in the direction of an egalitarian society, and I think for those who are in the privileged position we are in to use that privileged position to worsen the inequalities in our own favour is not the mark of responsible statesmen. Therefore, I hope we will think a little longer about this matter.

I confess that I take some pride in the fact that this bill has been around for a long time, that it has been delayed several months. It was brought in last December and the hope then was to have it through before Christmas. Here we are, almost into the month of May, and it is not through yet, and those of us who have caused the delay have done a service. The result is that in the intervening time some thinking has been done. Even the point of order I raised last week, on which Mr. Speaker ruled favourably, has had one substantial effect. The amendment to the bill regarding the commission which was before us last week when Mr. Speaker ruled three amendments out of order and to which the hon. member for York-Scarborough has referred was set up in such a way that once the commis-

sion reported to the cabinet in future parliaments, the cabinet could put increases into effect by order in council.

I found it offensive beyond understanding that this House would consider giving to the cabinet in future parliaments the right to make increases in the indemnities and allowances of members of parliament. Thanks to the ruling made from the Chair last week, there have been a few days to think it over. The amendment put in today in the name of the President of the Privy Council still includes commissions to be set up after each general election, but there has been withdrawn from it—and I commend the government for this—the right of the government to put the recommendations of such a commission into effect by order in council.

If there have been several changes since last December, and if there has been this further change since a week ago tomorrow, I suggest that a little more time might cause the members of the government and the members of this House to give a little more serious thought to the enormity of what we are doing. I have in mind the fact that we are in the very top income earning bracket of the people in this country and this separates us, as the elite, from the people we are supposed to represent. In my view, we should not be doing it at all.

● (1630)

The several amendments now before the House, both those that were on the order paper and those moved on the floor, deal with several things. I can see the voting getting a bit complicated when the time comes, because all those things have been put together, the question of the amount of the indemnities—is it to be \$24,000 or is it to be \$22,500 as proposed by the hon. member for Parry Sound-Muskoka (Mr. Darling)? I understand the reason he arrived at that figure is that it would represent a 25 per cent increase over what the pay is at the present time.

Then the question of the effective date is involved. Is it to be retroactive to last July 8, the day of the election, is it to be retroactive to January 1, 1975, or is it to come into effect on July 1, 1975? The various votes will have to deal with these various issues.

Then there will be the question of the commission. I am glad the President of the Privy Council has dropped the impossible idea in permitting increases in future parliaments to be brought in by order in council. But now from the hon. member for York-Scarborough we have a real improvement in the idea of a commission. The commission in motion No. 4 is simply a commission appointed after each election to consider an increase in the pay for that immediate parliament. But the proposal of the hon. member for York-Scarborough is that we set up a much more independent commission with authority to review the whole matter of what happens to members of parliament and to make recommendations which could only be put into effect for the succeeding parliament. I think he is to be commended for the proposal, and his amendment will certainly have my support.

The other thing that is done in this batch of motions and votes now before us, concerning which I intend to move an amendment, is something that I regard as a piece of gross dishonesty. I refer to the 7 per cent compounding escalation that is provided in motion No. 4 moved by the Presi-