

*Members' Salaries*

would put them in relatively the same position they were in 1971, using the government's own criteria. For that reason, I reached the conclusion that the only salary increase that is warranted would be one based on the increase in the cost of living since 1971. I say, on behalf of my colleagues, that this is exactly the position we take and it is exactly the proposition I put to the government House leader in recent hours. I say most sincerely that I regret it was not accepted.

I say, on behalf of my party, that the suggestion I put is fair and its acceptance would have removed some of the acrimony that has been created. It would also have ensured, if there is any doubt about it, that MPs would be home in time to spend Christmas with their families and able to stay there for a reasonable period of time.

● (1630)

This brings me to the principal point in stating our opposition to this bill as it now stands and to the bill after it is amended, if it is amended, along the lines proposed by the government House leader earlier today. This bill will not only leave members of parliament in the same very high income position vis-à-vis the rest of Canadian society, but in fact it will heighten our position in terms of the distribution of income in Canada.

In 1972, members of parliament were in the top 1.5 per cent of all income tax payers. Stated differently, this means that 98.5 per cent of all the working people in Canada who pay taxes and who have living expenses as well, earn less than members of parliament. So we can hardly see ourselves as being part of an economically depressed minority. Quite the converse is the case: we are among the affluent in society and I do not think we should forget that. I do not deny the expenses which many of us have and will continue to have in terms of carrying out our responsibilities.

I want to stress, for the benefit of all members, that it seems to me we must keep in mind that we are among the very affluent in our country. As I have said, if this bill should pass, that position vis-à-vis the rest of society will be heightened for members of parliament. We will move from being among the top 1.5 per cent to being among the top .5 per cent. Surely this is unacceptable. At a time when our government, and indeed governments around the world, should be doing whatever they can to overcome inequalities within their societies, this measure will do just the opposite: it will exacerbate existing inequalities in Canada rather than alleviate them.

A month and a half ago the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde), in a speech in Toronto, provided a very disturbing set of statistics. He did so in a very eloquent and persuasive manner. I wish to refer to some of the current information provided by the minister in that speech. I shall very briefly summarize four points. First, the minister pointed out that in 1972, in Canada, 20 per cent of our families had an income of less than \$5,500. Second, in 1972 the bottom 20 per cent of our families received only 6 per cent of the total income in Canada. Third, the top 20 per cent, in contrast, received approximately 40 per cent of the income, exactly twice what would be deserved if strict proportionality were used as a criterion. Fourth, and perhaps most significant, the minis-

[Mr. Broadbent.]

ter documented in that speech that during the last 20 years of so-called progressive governments at the provincial and federal levels there had been virtually no change in the income distribution among our people.

In statistical terms there has been a slight change of rather insignificant proportion. That change has been a regressive one. The change that has occurred has meant that the rich have been, and are, receiving proportionately more of the income in Canada today than they were 20 years ago, and the 20 per cent of Canadians who are poor are receiving somewhat less in proportion today than they were 20 years ago. Surely this situation is unacceptable to members of parliament who are concerned—and I think members of all parties are concerned—about the problem of inequality. The members of this party are concerned about the need for demonstrable leadership on this question. This does not mean increasing our own salaries and making ourselves proportionately much wealthier than other Canadians.

I wish to refer to one more statistic which was not contained in the minister's speech. It is one which should concern all of us. This information was obtained from Statistics Canada. In 1973, 5.7 million Canadians lived at or below the poverty level. That is just a year ago. That figure represents a little better than a quarter of our population; in other words, a little better than a quarter of all Canadians, whether they live in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Oshawa, whether they are farmers, fishermen or whatever, are living in poverty. We are not talking about the depression; we are not talking about the thirties; we are talking about the seventies. A quarter of our population is living at the poverty level at a time when many members—specifically the government, because it must accept responsibility for making this proposal—wish members of parliament to be among the most affluent people in Canada.

I repeat that surely that is unacceptable. In his speech in Toronto when he provided this information, the Minister of National Health and Welfare intimated that he believed it was wrong that this degree of inequality should exist and persist in the future. He indicated that his government would soon be taking steps to reduce these inequalities. I repeat the point I made a few moments ago, that instead of narrowing the gap and showing that we are concerned about the poorer people and about the maldistribution of funds, which means maldistribution of the capacity to enjoy life for adults and their children, instead of doing something concrete about this problem we are simply improving our own position with these proposals.

To my party, at least, and everything it has stood for in the history of the socialist movement in Canada, that is unacceptable. I would also suggest that one does not have to be a member or supporter of the New Democratic Party of Canada to take this position. I not only suggest that, but I know it very well because of the telephone calls, letters and telegrams which have been received in the last few days. Thousands of Canadians who have a sense of decency and equity find it unacceptable for us to move in the way the government, in terms of its original wage proposals or the amended proposals, suggests we should move. This situation merely exacerbates the inequities which exist in our country.