

Family Income Security Plan

the minister not have the same information the previous week when they told committee members that the delay would be six or seven months, and last September when they specified a May starting date less than eight months away? It is even more suspicious when paralleled with the assistant deputy minister's statement that the time estimate was reached, according to his statement on page 12:7 of the committee's proceedings; "after a very realistic and completely detailed approach with the advice of experts, consultants, from the outside who were hired for this purpose." If such expert help was contracted by the department, why did its most senior officials not know about it?

• (1130)

Another feeble excuse offered by the staff of the assistant deputy minister for the delay was the recent unemployment insurance catastrophe. He expressed the need to allow more computer time in order to avoid the same type of situation. The question then arises as to why the officials of the Department of National Health and Welfare took so long to learn their lesson. The unemployment insurance mess took place over the winter months, peaking around February. Why did the officials not then take note of the problem, institute a plan to avoid such a mess in the FISP cheques and set a reasonable target date for the implementation of the FISP bill in line with such a goal?

At best, the government is guilty of a lack of foresight. At worst, they are guilty of being insincere in introducing Bill C-264 with no intention of implementing it in the foreseeable future and therefore ignoring the administrative details.

From the time FISP was originally announced in December, 1970, up to May, 1972, the consumer price index rose by 6.5 per cent. By the summer of 1973, the increase may well reach the 10 per cent mark. Therefore, by the time FISP is operational Canada's families will be deprived of the buying power of the family allowance dollar whose levels were set two and a half years previously. And who is to say how many families will have been made ineligible for family allowances because inflation has priced them out of the FISP levels, even though their buying power may be unchanged?

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, undoubtedly the hon. member is aware that during the course of the deliberations on this bill it was necessary to undertake discussions with the provinces with respect to how this concept fitted in with their priorities. They had many suggestions to make. They wished time to consider the bill and some of its provisions and to make suggestions for changes. Quebec, to single out that province in particular, had many suggestions to make which involved detailed discussions. It was impossible to forecast how long those discussions would take. This is a partial explanation for some of the delays involved. To this we should add House time itself.

In terms of the time necessary to provide for the administrative arrangements, I believe it well behooves us to err, if anything, on the side of caution in this effort inasmuch as we have listened to some of the admonitions of the opposition with respect to what has happened with

[Mr. Marshall.]

regard to administrative foul-ups. Many of the opposition members gave us some very excited speeches about what they fear in this regard, and we will certainly take every precaution necessary to ensure that, administratively, this program is run in a smooth, effective and efficient way. When Dr. Willard described what would be necessary in terms of lead time in the committee I believe that his explanations were perfectly justified.

I should like to refer now to the acceptability or otherwise of this motion. I believe, Sir, that you have indicated that it is acceptable on procedural grounds. I would argue that it is unacceptable because it would mean that—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): The minister is a little late.

Mr. Speaker: The minister is now arguing on a point of order when the motion is already before the House. He will appreciate that this cannot be done. He can consider only the substance of the motion, not its procedural acceptability.

Mr. Munro: Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge that I am belated on the procedural point but it seems to us that it would be impossible to pay FISP benefits immediately on Royal Assent. In view of the time required to analyse the statements of income and the administrative procedures necessary, I am sure it is readily apparent to all hon. members just how impossible this situation would be. For these reasons and from a common sense point of view I would argue the unacceptability of this motion.

An hon. Member: How long would this take?

Mr. Munro: An hon. member has yelled, "How long would this take". I would point out to him—

Mr. Lewis: He did not yell; he asked politely.

Mr. Munro:—that this was considered at great length in the standing committee. I indicated, and so did the deputy minister, that we would hope to submit application forms and information booklets to all those people wishing to apply for the new FISP benefits so they could fill these out in a considered fashion. Based on the requirements in the legislation, we would like them to submit the information on the previous year's income. We think this would fit in very well with the terms of their income tax statements which they will file during the first three months of next year. Thus they can avoid having to file different statements for different periods of time. This would be of considerable help in terms of the simplification of administration. The deputy minister indicated in the committee that he would expect the program to be under way during the course of the next summer. That is the explanation of why this number of months would be required for the implementation of this legislation.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, the point which has been made in the discussion of this amendment is a very important one. I rise once again to stress its seriousness and to make a plea to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro) that