

Mr. Baldwin: The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) and I must share in the good things of life. Would the minister be kind enough to repeat his request?

Mr. Munro: If the hon. member would be kind enough to read the fourth and fifth lines of his amendment which start, "with an instruction to consider the advisability of inserting". I am not clear what comes after that.

Mr. Baldwin: It reads, "instruction to consider the advisability of inserting therein the following clause".

Mr. Munro: Mr. Speaker, I listened to the rather ingenious argument of the hon. member for Peace River on motion No. 7, and I thought that we might have the pleasure of hearing it all over again but apparently that is not to be so. It appears that his contention is that this is really not a specific instruction for the expenditure of additional moneys. I believe he relies entirely on the phraseology "with an instruction to consider" as saving him from the application of that particular rule. I do not think it does in this particular case, Mr. Speaker, inasmuch as he indicates further on what those instructions are to be. They are quite specific; that we are to increase the old age security pension. We are not just to consider the increase, but to consider it in very specific terms as follows:

—so as to reflect the full increase in the consumer price index since the first of January, 1967 to date with adjustments to the guaranteed income supplement.

If one takes just the component dealing with retroactivity to 1967, those instructions are quite clear, quite specific. They call for additional expenditures, a function that cannot be performed by other than the government. This amendment would necessitate the additional expenditure of many millions of dollars. With sufficient time, I could obtain an estimate of the amount involved. Certainly, the retroactivity feature, if tied in with the escalation for the cost of living going back to January 1, 1972, we estimate would cost somewhere in the vicinity of \$80 million.

I would want to check my figures, but if I am correct in that, hon. members can readily understand the additional expenditure required to take the retroactivity of the escalation back to January, 1967. If I am correct on the \$80 million figure, we are probably talking about several hundreds of millions of dollars in the application of this particular feature, not even taking into account the adjustments to the guaranteed income supplement, if the amendment means more than merely the retroactive escalation of the old age security back that long.

I might indicate as well that, while we are dealing with the rather monumental additional expenditures called for by this particular part of the amendment, when you add that to the expenditures we are already committed to with reference to this particular bill in the sense that it calls for expenditures of some \$250 million to \$280 million, to say nothing of the cost of the exemptions announced by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) for senior citizens, we can see that this type of impact over and above what is already planned would be very serious indeed.

I must say that since the amendment is so specific as to what the committee is to do, what additional expenditures there will be—and it is possible to estimate very precisely

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what those expenditures would be—I fail to see how the hon. member for Peace River can any longer rely on the generality of the words "an instruction to consider". For that reason, I think it is quite obviously an inappropriate amendment at this particular time, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Baldwin: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to repeat what I said, although if I am pressed I will repeat part of it. What the minister has said demonstrates the wisdom of a course of this kind. The minister has been making an argument in this House, which I think is the wrong place to make it, against using the words in the amendment of the hon. member for Simcoe North (Mr. Rynard), "the advisability of inserting therein the following clause".

If this amendment were passed, what would happen? Let us cast our minds ahead. The committee would be seized of jurisdiction by reason of the direction of this House. It is quite plain that there is no firm, mandatory direction to the committee to insert it, but to consider the advisability of inserting it. That involves several things. First, should those words be inserted? What about the question of cost vis-à-vis benefits to the people involved, the old age pensioners, the people of this country who are so detrimentally affected by inflation? The minister might be able to appear before the committee and make a convincing argument, as he has attempted to make here, that it would not be advisable to do it. If he were successful the committee would reject the amendment.

On the other hand, if he were not able to convince the committee that it would be advisable to do it, then they could make a proposal to insert those words but, as I repeat, with the safeguards I have referred to before and which make it quite plain that it cannot be done unless all the requirements are met which have to be met when we deal with matters of a financial nature. We have been a little ingenious, and we have had to be. We are not yet the government but time will shortly cure that. Until we are the government, in dealing with these matters we are compelled to make propositions of this nature.

I would go a step further. If one looks at the financial recommendation which appears on the bill itself, it is couched in fairly vague terms. The first few lines read:

His Excellency the Governor General has recommended to the House of Commons the present measure to amend the Old Age Security Act; to fix the basic amount of the old age pension at \$80 per month—

• (1640)

There has been no attempt to change that. I continue:

—and to provide that it will be escalated annually to reflect the full amount of any increase in the Consumer Price Index with the initial escalation—

I draw Your Honour's attention to the words, "to reflect the full amount of any increase." There is a strong element of vagueness and variability about this, Mr. Speaker. The act attempts to define Consumer Price Index in clause 1 as follows:

'Consumer Price Index' with respect to any fiscal year or any twelve-month period means the average of the Consumer Price Index for Canada, as published by Statistics Canada under the authority of the Statistics Act, for each month in that fiscal year or twelve-month period,—