

Inquiries of the Ministry

salaries, can the minister indicate whether it is his intention to support and accept the position of the government of Manitoba in the interest of fairness?

Hon. E. J. Benson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the steps that were taken at the previous meeting of first ministers, and again at the meeting of federal and provincial finance ministers and treasurers, were to request that the provinces should take every step possible to make sure that rents do not rise too quickly and that professional organizations would be dealt with by them. There was general agreement that they should move in this direction, and many of them indicated that they had moved in this direction.

Mr. Saltsman: Can the minister assure the House that the proposed guidelines stated at the conclusion of the federal-provincial conference, and the indications the minister gave us today, will not be implemented until a committee of the House of Commons has had an opportunity to examine the entire proposal?

Mr. Benson: No, Mr. Speaker.

INFLATION—PROPOSED SIX PER CENT WAGE
INCREASE LIMITATION—CONSULTATION
BY DR. YOUNG WITH GOVERNMENT

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Although the minister has said that the government and the Prices and Incomes Commission are at arm's length, is it not a fact that at Winnipeg he was fully aware of the nature and details of the proposals by Dr. Young before he commenced his speech and made his statement?

Hon. E. J. Benson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, Dr. Young, I understand, was in contact with all the governments before the meeting at Winnipeg for informal discussions in which he stated the suggestions he had in mind so that they could be considered before the meeting took place.

Mr. Hees: A supplementary question to the Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker. Does the Prime Minister seriously intend to leave the impression with the House that the Chairman of the Prices and Incomes Commission does not consult very intimately with members of the government before he comes out with any proposal or policy? Does he expect us to believe that he acts completely independently and on his own?

[Mr. Saltsman.]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. It is very difficult for the Chair to accept the question as asked. The question was asked in an argumentative way. Perhaps the hon. member would like to rephrase the question.

Mr. Hees: As you know, Mr. Speaker, I hate to be argumentative, so I will ask my question in a straightforward and unargumentative way. Does the Prime Minister intend to leave the impression with the House that the Chairman of the Prices and Incomes Commission makes his decisions and comes forward with proposals and propositions to the Canadian public completely on his own, without very close consultation with ministers of this government before he does so?

Mr. Baldwin: Does he do it in splendid isolation?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, there is consultation with the government. There was consultation with all governments before the Chairman of the Prices and Incomes Commission made his February proposals to the private sector of the economy. He also consulted with business and with labour. He follows the same procedure with governments, including our own. His aim, I take it, is not to come up with a proposal which will catch the authorities by surprise. He wants to test them first. He wants to see how far they are prepared to support him. In this sense he has consulted us but he has consulted us with a view to seeing how we would react to one thing or another, and then he goes on and acts on his own authority.

INFLATION—PROPOSED SIX PER CENT WAGE
INCREASE LIMITATION—APPLICATION TO
OLD AGE PENSIONS

Mr. Frank Howard (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, may I direct a supplementary question to the Minister of Finance. Will the proposition that the 6 per cent ceiling be imposed on all increases be adhered to with respect to increases for old age pensioners?

Hon. E. J. Benson (Minister of Finance): Well, Mr. Speaker, the question of old age pensioners was dealt with in a debate in the House not too long ago. The old age pensioners have the sympathy of this government and no government in the history of Canada has done more for our old age pensioners than we have in the past several years.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Hees: There speaks 30-buck Benson.