

Old Age Security Act

One further aspect of this bill worries me. This problem concerns the fact that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) must expect old age pensioners to be financial wizards. This year, old age pensioners are to receive, effective the first day of the calendar year, a cost of living increase in their pensions based on the rise in the consumer price index over the fiscal year. Next year they will receive, on the first day of the fiscal year, a cost of living increase based on the rise in the consumer price index during the 1972 calendar year. With visions of fiscal and calendar years dancing in their heads, they will have many sleepless nights trying to figure out what amount of money they can count on through old age security benefits over the next few months.

• (1710)

I would like, Mr. Speaker, during this debate to place reform of old age pensions in the context of the budget itself. This reform has more to recommend it than the fact that it is long overdue. It is the single initiative in the budget that will provide direct stimulus to aggregate demand and thereby immediate stimulus to job creation. It is not adequate but it is one step in the right direction. I think it is appropriate to talk about the over-all effect of the budget in this debate because this measure and the budget are primarily responses to continuing inflation in Canada.

The continuing improvement in old age pensions will protect old people against inflation and provide some stimulus to the economy as a whole. The over-all budget, however, will perpetuate massive unemployment to fight inflation. The budget is not really directed toward reducing unemployment. The budget is not directed toward reaching full employment in the future. The budget does not represent a change in policy. All the government has done is to shift from creating massive unemployment to perpetuating it. This situation is not the fault of the Canadian economy and it is not a whim of fate. We have mass unemployment and will continue to have mass unemployment because this is the wilful policy of the government.

The budget could have been designed to get us on a swift path to full employment. The corporate tax cuts are necessary, but in my opinion they will do little to reduce unemployment directly. Their effect will not be significant until the latter part of 1973. This, of course, is common knowledge in economic circles and also in government circles. We know, and the government knows, that full employment is possible without running the risk of inflation greater than that of our major trading partners. All that stands in the way is a fearful government that refuses to allow the individual taxpayer and the economy to realize their potentials.

I will not deal with the many programs the minister announced and the "great" policies that the government has come up with in past years. He mentioned the Canada Assistance Plan and the housing program. If there is one thing that worries me and many Canadians, it is the situation with regard to housing, particularly for old age pensioners and senior citizens. I hope the minister will be able to persuade his colleagues to adopt a proper housing program for poor Canadians. I shall end my speech, Mr.

[Mr. Marshall.]

Speaker, by moving the following amendment, seconded by the hon. member for South Shore (Mr. Crouse):

That all the words after "That" be struck out and there be substituted the following:

"this House, deeply conscious of the need to increase the old age security pension so as to reflect the full increase in the consumer price index since January 1, 1967, to date with adjustments to the guaranteed income supplement, is of the opinion that the government should consider the advisability of introducing appropriate amendments to effect such changes to the present limited terms of the bill."

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I have received a copy of the amendment from the hon. member. I am sure hon. members can assist the Chair, because I wonder whether the amendment is acceptable from a procedural standpoint. I do not know how many copies are available for hon. members, so I shall again read the amendment without indicating whether it is procedurally acceptable. It reads:

That all the words after "That" be struck out and there be substituted the following:

"this House, deeply conscious of the need to increase the old age security pension so as to reflect the full increase in the consumer price index since January 1, 1967, to date with adjustments to the guaranteed income supplement, is of the opinion that the government should consider the advisability of introducing appropriate amendments to effect such changes to the present limited terms of the bill."

It seems to the Chair that this wording does not meet one of the tests which we must apply to reasoned amendments. I may be in error on this and I know hon. members will relate their remarks to it. The question is whether or not it opposes the progress of the bill, whether or not it opposes the principle of the bill; in short, whether or not the reasoned amendment is contrary to and opposes the principle of the bill.

Second, according to the hon. member's own words his amendment refers to "introducing appropriate amendments to effect such changes to the present limited terms of the bill." These proposed amendments are not spelled out in his motion and the question in my mind is whether this is something that might be done normally in committee. I would appreciate the advice of hon. members.

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, the amendment put forward by my colleague is a reasoned amendment. We must bear in mind the particular difficulties which face a member of this House who is not of the administration in putting forward an amendment which proposes to affect the level of pensions payable under a government bill. As Your Honour can readily see, that is the purport of my colleague's amendment. He wishes the cost of living escalator to be effective from the date when increases in the cost of living were made applicable to old age pensions. To that extent one must go back to a particular incident in which I do not believe Your Honour was personally involved. I should not call it an incident. It was the occasion on September 13 last when the House was considering second reading of Bill C-259 and I put a reasoned amendment before the House.

At that time there was considerable discussion with regard to the use of reasoned amendments which, I may say, seem to be rather strange birds in this House. As a matter of fact, it was only during the latter months of 1971