

Members' Salaries

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): There is nothing in the report of the committee to this House which says that the committee submits these amendments provided the Governor General agrees. The report of the committee is simply the report of a bill, and the chairman of that committee raised no procedural objection to these amendments; therefore I say that chairmen of committees in the future will not be able to register procedural objections to money amendments to money bills.

There is going to be a bill amending the Old Age Security Act soon to be brought in by the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde). I have in mind the one which will provide pensions to spouses between 60 and 65 where the other spouse is over 65. In that committee I will be able to move that the pension be increased and that it be paid to all persons 60 years of age or over, and if the chairman tries to say that that is exceeding the Governor General's recommendation, I will be able to cite this bill, C-44, as an example. I will say that surely I have the right to make my motion and have the bill reported, in the hope that the President of the Privy Council or someone, when we get back to the report stage, will bring down a recommendation of the Governor General.

I am an opposition member, I have been most of my life, and I may be in the opposition for quite a while yet—

An hon. Member: For the rest of your life also.

An hon. Member: Certainly in the opposition.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):—and we on the opposition side frequently feel frustrated by the requirement of the recommendation of the Governor General. I am sure that if anyone has done any procedural research in the last day or so, he has probably found occasions when I have tried to move amendments which involved the expenditure of money, only to be told that I could not do so because I could not obtain the recommendation of the Governor General.

One which comes to my mind in particular was in 1966 when we were debating the Medical Care Act. The present Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. MacEachen) at that time was the minister of national health and welfare. We pleaded with the minister to amend that act to make it possible for medicare to extend to optometrists and other paramedical groups. At first the minister said no. I moved an amendment for that extension but was told it could not be done because I could not produce the recommendation of the Governor General. So we pleaded with the minister to do it. The minister finally agreed, but I draw the attention of the Chair to the way with which it was dealt. Once the minister had agreed in committee of the whole that the act should be amended to provide for these paramedical services, under certain restrictions, the committee rose, reported progress, a new recommendation of the Governor General was presented to the Chair, the resolution attached to it was passed and we went back into committee and made the appropriate amendment.

But—and I say this to my hon. friend opposite—the order should be noted: we obtained the approval of the Governor General first, not afterwards. Once we establish a precedent that the recommendation of the Governor General can be obtained afterwards, we private members

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

in this House are in for a field day: we can do it every time a money bill goes to a committee.

I also remind the Chair of the experience of this House when another important piece of legislation, the Canada Pension Plan Act, was dealt with in 1964 and 1965. I ask that it be studied in particular because I think it is a classic example of the right way to do things. In the special joint committee on that bill we found that there were a number of changes we wanted to make. Some of them were procedural and administrative. It was within our power to make them, we made them in committee and so reported the bill. But there were other changes we wanted to make which we and our joint chairmen knew we could not do because they involved the expenditure of money, so attached to the bill we sent back a report recommending that certain additional changes be made and the government brought in the appropriate recommendation of the Governor General and the appropriate legislation to make those changes.

I submit that that is the correct way, and that is what this committee should have done. I am not now saying whether I think it should have done it because I want the substance of the committee's proposal, for I do not, but I suggest that procedurally the committee should have confined itself, so far as the bill was concerned, to making those amendments it had the right to make, but that with respect to amendments it had no authority to make it should, instead, have made a recommendation to the House and to the government that those recommendations be made.

I submit that what is now called for is a ruling of this House that the steps should be retraced and that it should be done the right way. I am sure there will be hon. members who will ask what difference there is, and who will say that the end of that process will be just the same as if we today accept the motion of the President of the Privy Council; that we will send the bill back, we will get the same thing back and we will be right back where we were. But the point at issue is the financial procedures of this House, the question of the authority of the executive and the question of whether private members can make these changes.

Incidentally, just to make the record clear, most of the amendments made to this bill in committee were made in the name of the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Reid), who is a private member, but one very important one was made by the hon. member for Malpeque (Mr. MacLean), a private member who sits on this side of the House and who has no authority to obtain a recommendation of the Governor General. He moved the amendment which calls for the government in future parliaments to have the authority to set up a commission and on the basis of that commission's report to increase the salaries of members of parliament by order in council without coming back to the House of Commons at all.

These things could have been the subject of a recommendation by the committee to the House, whereupon the government could do what the President of the Privy Council is now doing, but I submit very seriously that this procedure is one which does great havoc and great harm to our financial procedures.