

Two other types of indexing possibilities should be explored. One is the creation of a special senior citizens' index which would reflect the spending patterns characteristic of this particular population group. This index should be formulated around the cluster method, derived by isolating the age, labour force status and number of people in the family unit. Some studies which have been done on special groups, such as low income populations, have shown that there was not much difference between a special CPI and the regular CPI and, in fact, in some cases the special CPI was lower. Other economists have pointed out that these studies were not sufficiently sophisticated and that in fact a comprehensive special CPI has not been properly done in Canada. A senior citizens' index, taking into account the cluster characteristics identified earlier, must be explored.

A second possibility is to compare increases in the cost price index and guaranteed income supplement with the average wage and salary in Canada. When the old age supplement was first introduced in 1952, until 1964 it was equivalent to approximately 17 per cent of the earnings of the average worker. Since 1964 its value has been allowed to fall so that the OAS is now equivalent to only 13.5 per cent of the average wage and salary earnings. During the last 15 years, therefore, the old age supplement has failed to keep pace with the growth of incomes of other Canadians.

May I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Johnston) and StatsCanada might consider some other solutions. First, pensioners should immediately have an income of at least 25 per cent above the poverty line. Mr. Speaker, in spite of the cries for restraint and government cutbacks, no country that has any self-respect or measure of decency and which is as rich as ours can stand for anything less than that. If we can afford several billion dollars for fighter planes, most of which we do not need or cannot use, surely we have money for this.

Mr. Paproski: Right on.

Mr. Benjamin: Pensioners should be fully guaranteed and protected against inflation after they have arrived at a basic 25 per cent above the poverty line, and this would allow them a little more measure of decency. These people could then take equal part with the rest of the people in Canada in a rising standard of living that the average worker and employee in the country attains over a period of years in his lifetime at work.

My final point, Mr. Speaker, is that the OAS and GIS pension systems are a transfer payment. That means that money for this system comes from a big pot from which it can be distributed any number of ways to any number of programs. The Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) when she was speaking on Bill C-16 insisted that there was not enough money. Her solution was to pump more money in as soon as the economy expands.

That solution of hers is a neat sidestep. The money is there for the asking if the income distribution system is made to work the way it was intended when Parliament passed those laws, money given to groups which need it the most. Surely no

one will doubt or argue that our senior citizens qualify for that dubious honour. The profits of our corporations, the salaries and wages of our working people, have been rising, in the case of corporations too much, and in the case of our wage and salary earners sometimes enough, sometimes not enough. Surely if that can occur in our society, it can automatically occur in lock step for our senior citizens.

I am happy that the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board has located in that department the document for which we asked on the order paper under our motion for the production of papers and that it will now be provided to the House after I sit down, tomorrow or whenever. We will be pleased to have it. I know that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre will want to examine it extremely carefully and he may want to raise the matter later.

Mr. Knowles: I have had it since December.

Mr. Howard Crosby (Halifax West): Mr. Speaker, I want to speak very briefly in support of the motion put forward by the hon. member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin). I realize that some procedural difficulty has been occasioned by the fact that the report which the hon. member seeks is now in the hands of the parliamentary secretary and can be tabled in the House. But I think the motion put forward by the hon. member for Regina West goes beyond the mere mechanics of tabling the report at this stage and points up the special circumstances under which the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre raised the matter in the first case last December in the House. I think what was in the minds of those members, and indeed in my own mind and in the minds of many members on this side of the House, was the very special needs of senior citizens. So this report was a start in dealing with those special needs and a recognition of the very difficult situation in which senior citizens find themselves in this day and age.

● (1720)

As I travel throughout my constituency and across Canada, I am very mindful of the fact that senior citizens are more affected by the inflationary costs we see about us than other citizens. Particularly the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) is very mindful of this. It has been raised time and time again in the House. It was in response to those kinds of concerns that the special index idea was promoted.

As I understand it, the special index would take into account the goods, materials and services senior citizens must have in order to survive which in relation to senior citizens are quite different. For example, they may be less concerned with the cost of motor vehicles and appliances, but very much concerned with the cost of food, home heating fuels and the very basic necessities of life. I do not think anyone in the House or elsewhere would deny the special status senior citizens ought to have in a wealthy economy such as our own. I do not think anyone would deny to those in their golden years the right to