

Supply—Finance

was established as the base year in calculating the cost of living index. I do not remember what the cost of living index was at that time but I think it certainly was around 150. It was immediately put back to 100. A new base year was determined upon and the cost of living index today is shown on the basis of the new foundation year used in the index.

Desirous as I am at all times to accommodate the opposition I could not give such an undertaking. I have already stated that there is a possibility that the next session may not be too far removed. If I were in a position at this moment to say more than that I would do so. I am sure that hon. gentlemen having regard to the world situation and Canada's position will realize that while I have an antipathy for starting the session in the fall rather than in January circumstances may conceivably require that the next session be not delayed until January.

In the meantime, this report of the committee will be studied. If action by the governor in council within its constitutional authority is possible and necessary, I could not agree to binding the government in advance as suggested by the hon. gentleman to fail to exercise its constitutional power by a promise made at the present time. However, if action is to be taken and is determined upon and it is within the authority of the governor in council, then as soon as the house is reconvened the opposition will have every opportunity to show its lack of confidence in the action taken by the constitutional means of an amendment to the speech from the throne.

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Chairman, we are talking now about the report of a committee which is in the hands of the government. That committee was set up during this session after parliamentary discussion and through what I think I can fairly call parliamentary initiative. In that respect the recommendations of this committee, if any, differ from the precedent which the Prime Minister has cited of recommendations which were made to the government in the past concerning the alteration of the base on which the cost of living index should be established. There is a parliamentary connection with this committee.

So far as I know there is no question about the government's power and authority to implement the recommendations of this or any other committee which is reporting to the government. That does not seem to me to be in question at all. The government, of course, can do what it likes. It can accept the recommendations of this committee and

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

implement them, it can accept the recommendations and do nothing about them for the time being until parliament has had a chance to examine them, or it can reject them and do nothing at all.

After all, these are the recommendations of a committee on a matter of importance, of course, a matter of controversy, though a technical matter. What is the best statistical method of measuring unemployment? The government has the power to do anything it likes with this report. The question is, what is the best procedure to follow, what is the best way of measuring unemployment, so that the differences of opinion that have arisen in the past over how this matter can be removed and so that when we discuss unemployment in the house we shall be discussing unemployment and not methods of calculating it. Therefore, Mr. Chairman, I would think that from everybody's point of view it would have been desirable to have had parliamentary agreement on any new kind of procedure if we are to make a change. That is what we were asking for before the change was made.

We are asking that the report of this committee be submitted to the appropriate parliamentary committee so that if possible there can be agreement on a procedure for measuring unemployment, an agreement by which we will all feel ourselves bound, and an agreement which will remove the kind of argument and, if you like, controversy, which we have had now for quite a long time, going back to 1954 and 1955, in respect of this matter. What we have asked for is merely an assurance on the part of the government that before action is taken parliament will have a chance to consider the matter through a parliamentary committee.

The Prime Minister is unable to give us that assurance. He rests on the power of the government to take any action which it feels necessary. We do not challenge that power; we question the propriety of the government that has that authority taking that attitude.

Mr. Winch: I do not know whether I can ask this question on this vote; I hope I can. It has to do with a matter about which I feel very strongly. The members of this group are most interested in the maintenance of peace in the world. At the time of the difficulties between Israel and Egypt the House of Commons was in session and it passed on our emergency force. At the time of the Congo difficulty the House of Commons was sitting and we gave the government the authority to act. I am most concerned about the period when the House of Commons may not be in session. I hope nothing occurs, but