

Income Tax Act

Mr. Harris: No, I think my hon. friend has missed my point. I am sorry; I will try it again. If all these organizations are running at a cost about equal to what they have to pay those whom they have insured, and their administrative costs, their income then by way of contributions from members of the association would about equal the medical costs which they pay. Therefore my hon. friend, by suggesting those costs should be tax exempt, is in fact suggesting a tax exemption for the medical expenses of all Canadians. If my hon. friend will consider it for a moment he will see that to the extent these sums of money represent the actual cost paid by these associations, they are the costs of the several thousand people who are in the associations during any given year.

Let us consider, then, Mr. Speaker, the situation with respect to the 3 per cent. As I say, I take it the amendment moved by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has rather shifted the emphasis away from that. Perhaps I could ask him at the moment, but I take it that these deductions would be in addition to the deductions over the 3 per cent.

Mr. Knowles: May I answer the question? Yes, that was the intent of my amendment. I went no further than that for the obvious reason that if I tried to interfere with the 3 per cent floor in this amendment I would be told the house decided that question on January 30. My point of view on the 3 per cent floor is still the same as it was on January 30.

Mr. Harris: We have then, as I understand it, a situation in which we are asked to exempt the contributions paid into a fund, while we are exempting as well the payments out of the fund when those payments exceed 3 per cent.

Mr. Knowles: But not both in the same year.

Mr. Harris: That is just the point of my question a moment ago.

Mr. Knowles: I am sorry. If I might interrupt further, I thought the minister's question a moment ago sought to clear the air with respect to our position on the 3 per cent floor. As to whether or not the amendment asks for both deductions in the same year, the amendment is clear in that it presents an option between (a) and (b). One option is any amounts paid for the taxpayer out of a fund and the other is the premiums he pays in.

Mr. Harris: I am sorry I misunderstood the hon. member, then. He has cleared up

what I thought was an unusual situation in the motion before us. It will be seen, however, Mr. Speaker, that if this motion were to carry it would be impossible, as I said a while ago, to estimate the cost to the public treasury. I know that hon. members opposite will say there will be no cost to the public treasury because the motion calls for consideration by the government of the suggestion put forward.

On that point we had a rather unhappy experience in recent years. There was a time in this house when private members' day was an occasion on which private members might bring forward any motion or bill they had in mind which would benefit the people of Canada. There was a certain practice, and I would use the word "courtesy" as well, that when the hon. member who presented the motion had made his argument, it was generally permitted to pass in the sense that it did not involve the government. It was merely an expression of opinion by this particular hon. member that this was something he felt should be said, and that all hon. members ought to be in the same position and the same consideration should be given because, in fact, they are hon. members and this is an idea they would like to put forward.

Mr. Knowles: How many times since the end of world war II have such motions been allowed to pass?

Mr. Harris: I could not say at the moment, but I will take your word for it.

Mr. Knowles: Not very many.

Mr. Harris: But times seem to have changed. Instead of having that type of motion, we now have motions which require the government or suggest the government should give consideration to the proposal, and on the one occasion we tried this out we were told after the event that the house had, in fact, decided this ought to be done. This was a departure from what had been the case in former times, if not immediately before that event occurred.

The government is put in the most awkward position of not being allowed, without some detriment, to extend to hon. members opposite the courtesy of permitting an argument to be made and allowing the matter to rest at that point. For that reason I approach this motion in the same light that we have approached other motions since this unhappy incident I mentioned, and feel that the government has to take—

Mr. Knowles: Unhappy on your side.