

*Medicare*

facts to the attention of the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) and his colleagues. I think a good many members on the other side of the house, well meaning people, who really want to see medicare brought in, just as we do—and as the Conservatives do, if I can accept their word for it—are feeling rather embarrassed and rather miserable tonight as a result of the situation in which the government finds itself.

I have no wish at all to add to that embarrassment. I want to say that, do what we will in the New Democratic Party, which I think it is fair to say is the only party in the house at this time which stands clearly for the introduction of a comprehensive universal health insurance plan by the government on the proposed date, we are not going to be successful in stopping the retreat of the government from this undertaking. The government is going to be successful one way or the other in shelving for a year or a year and a half, perhaps more, the implementation of a system that is so much needed in this country and which it is so obviously appropriate to introduce right away.

I have heard arguments about the need for medicare or health insurance by people who do not say exactly “no” to it but who certainly say “whoa” or “slow”, and I believe these arguments sound very much like the arguments I have read and which were expressed nearly one hundred years ago concerning universal, comprehensive education. The same sort of criticism was expressed about that plan. There is no question but that there is a need for health insurance in Canada. There is no question that we can supply it. Nor is there any question that if we do so, collectively, we can save money and get better results for all those concerned.

I wish to say, Mr. Speaker, that having made very little criticism of the government for its failure to act, I have a proposal to make to it at this time. I suggest that they give consideration to this proposal, namely that on the date originally scheduled by the government for the introduction of this comprehensive universal medical plan in Canada, we make a decision in the house to introduce a federal-provincial medicare program to cover at least all those citizens who are 60 years of age and over. I have three reasons for making this proposal. In the first place, such a plan would at once reduce the cost of living, and in some cases the cost of dying, to a great number of people in Canada. A great number of these people are those who are least able to afford the cost.

Second, if the government should make a start next year upon medicare for all those citizens over 60 years of age, this would improve our national health. If a comprehensive medical plan were put into operation it would permit the cure and prevention of disease, thus easing the health problems of a great number of our citizens in the age group I have mentioned.

Third, Mr. Speaker, it seems obvious that if we are going to make a start, even at the postponed date in 1968 which the government has suggested, it would probably be a practical thing for us to introduce a plan of health insurance across Canada for the age groups of 60 and over, so that we would have a practical test run of health insurance in this country. So, Mr. Speaker, without more criticism of the government or anybody else in the house, I leave the idea that if we cannot proceed with the national medicare plan on the date originally planned, at least we should give consideration to implementing that plan for all those citizens 60 years and over, beginning in our centennial year.

• (7:40 p.m.)

**Mr. A. D. Alkenbrack (Prince Edward-Lennox):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate the hon. member for Saskatoon (Mr. Brand), in whose speech I took particular interest. I was very much impressed by his convincing argument and sound logic put forward with full professional medical knowledge. I also congratulate all other members who have taken part in this debate.

I am a layman with no qualifications to speak in medical terms and with a limited knowledge of many of the references that have been made, so I am going to put forward by argument to the best of my ability from the standpoint of a layman-citizen-taxpayer of this great country of ours.

I followed with interest this debate on medicare, which concerns a subject vitally important to all of us, affecting as it does every citizen of Canada both today and in generations to come. One theme running through the whole debate to which I believe all in this chamber would subscribe is the need for a medical health plan. As we approach our centennial year, for the good of the country and in the interest of unity among the people we should have a functioning medical plan by 1967. But the government says no; it balks.

At this point I should like to refer to an editorial which appears in this evening's issue of the *Ottawa Journal* entitled “A strange promise on medicare”. I should like to attach