

*Medicare*

reduces the freedom of the individual to choose the services and insurance he requires.

I wonder whether some members on the government side do not ask themselves why this bill is receiving such unanimous and enthusiastic support from the New Democratic Party. It is not because it provides for the poor and needy. The Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia plans already do that, as do the plans proposed by other provinces. The real reason is that this plan is in accord with the socialist philosophy of the New Democratic Party.

**Mr. Douglas:** Also the Hall report.

**Mr. Aiken:** I would say to the hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam (Mr. Douglas) that the Hall report did not spell out in detail what the plan for medical care should be to the point this bill does and to the point he has indicated. It supports an agreed medical care plan and we also support a medical care plan.

**Mr. Douglas:** Would the hon. member point out any provision in this bill which is not fully supported and recommended in the Hall report?

**Mr. Aiken:** I was coming to that question by a reverse process. The Hall report does not suggest this bill in its totality. I have read the report and it says, basically, that medical care must be provided for those in need. But I have seen nothing in the report to the effect that it must be a plan compulsory for every person in Canada.

**Mr. Douglas:** That is exactly what it says.

**Mr. Aiken:** I beg to differ.

**Mr. MacEachen:** Well, read it.

**Mr. Aiken:** I have read it and I am sure most of my friends have read it carefully. I say this bill is not what the Hall Commission recommended.

**Mr. Douglas:** It is exactly what it recommended.

**Mr. Aiken:** I think we are wasting time discussing it because we have all read the report. The commission made recommendations which are general in nature, not specific, to be implemented by agreement.

In addition to the fact that this bill reflects the philosophy of the N.D.P. it throws a gigantic burden suddenly on the national economy. Moreover, it is not simply a plan to

[Mr. Aiken.]

provide for the needy. This could be achieved by supporting the three plans now in existence and, in due course, the proposed plans of other provinces. It constitutes another giant step toward socialism and it is unnecessary as a means of providing social justice. If the government really wants to provide free medical care across Canada for those who need it at a price the economy can afford and do it now, then the party opposite should support plans which provide, as a minimum, free premiums for those in need, reduced premiums for those with lower incomes, and membership for others on a voluntary basis at ordinary premium rates.

By supporting such a plan as the medical insurance plan in Ontario the government could move into the field of prepaid medical care across Canada in a reasonable and gradual way without swamping the economy. To put it bluntly, we could have federally supported medicare plans all across Canada by the original target date for this scheme, and ensure that all needy persons were looked after, if the government were to accept the principle of the amendment now before the house. By insisting on all or nothing, those who reject the amendment and push through the original bill will be depriving the needy in Canada of assistance in obtaining medical care for at least one additional year in six of our provinces.

**Mr. Knowles:** I wonder whether the hon. member would comment on the plan he is advocating in the context of a means test? Is he not importing a means test into medical care by proposing that medicare be made available free to those who cannot afford it at all and that others should pay part of the premiums? Would it not be better to stay away from a means test in this important piece of legislation?

**Mr. Aiken:** I have to admit that I do not like a means test. At the same time, I have seen the Ontario plan in effect for some months and it appears to be working satisfactorily. It works well. People who have no taxable income have their premiums paid and those who have low taxable incomes get reductions. No one goes around to individuals who apply asking them what their incomes are, how they live and so forth. The plan is based entirely on the statements of those who make application. As I say, if they pay no income tax they pay no premiums. I do not like a means test but I think that in the context of what we are doing a plan on the basis of the Ontario plan is satisfactory and