

Medicare

The most pathetic phrase in the speech of the Minister of National Health and Welfare was when he said, as reported at page 8612 of *Hansard*:

I do not propose to go into the reasons for this change—

An hon. Member: I think he was a little scared.

Mr. Douglas: I think there is a very good explanation why the minister did not want to go into the reasons for this change. It is that the minister cannot think of one reason that in good conscience he can give to this house. At least I give him credit for not standing up and going through some hypocritical jargon, because he has not any reasons that commend themselves to him. But I submit that this house has the right to be given some reasons. We should be given the reasons by whoever made this decision. Why have we not heard from the Minister of Finance, who apparently made this decision? Why have we not heard from the Prime Minister, who concurred in this decision? Who is behind this decision? Who is playing Mephistopheles to this unhappy Faust? I should like to know that. Surely those who are responsible for making this decision ought to have the courage to come into the house and tell us why they are breaking their pledged word.

We might as well face the fact that the Establishment in the Liberal party has never been happy about the idea of universal, comprehensive health insurance. Even during the election campaign last year when the Liberal party were beating the drums for medicare up and down the length and breadth of this country, the Minister of Finance in the comfortable constituency of Eglinton was assuring his constituents that they need not worry, that it probably would not come into effect on July 1, 1967.

It is noteworthy that on July 12 this year when we were debating the resolution and giving first reading to this bill, when the Minister of National Health and Welfare told us we would go on the next day to second reading the Progressive Conservative opposition drew attention to the fact that they had an assurance from the house leader, the Minister of Public Works (Mr. McIlraith) and from the Prime Minister that second reading was not going to be proceeded with. The next day the Minister of National Health and Welfare had to back down, and we did not proceed to second reading. If we had proceeded with it then, this legislation would now be passed. But it was held up, and in

September when we met here to deal with the railway strike, the Prime Minister gave us the firm assurance that medicare was on the list. Then he went off to England to attend the Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference. As soon as he left, on September 8 the Minister of Finance announced that medicare was going to be postponed for a year. When the Prime Minister returned he concurred in that decision.

The *Toronto Star* of September 6 said:

The enemies of medicare are taking advantage of the current—and justified—concern over inflation.

They are dropping suggestions that as one means of avoiding unnecessary government expenditure and reducing inflationary pressures, the Pearson government should postpone its proposed national medical care insurance plan, now hopefully scheduled for July 1, 1967.

Now notice this accolade, this ill-deserved accolade:

We are glad Prime Minister Pearson has shown the strength and judgment to resist this insidious suggestion. He assured the House of Commons Thursday that medicare is still priority legislation for this year.

And two days later the Minister of Finance wielded the axe and medicare was off the list for another year. We are going to get some explanation from the Minister of Finance when the legislation comes before the committee of the whole, because we are not satisfied with the off-the-cuff reasons that have been given. The Minister of Finance said first of all that this postponement was necessary to cope with the problem of inflation, and every economist in the country has been laughing ever since. Medicare will not infuse \$680 million of new money into the economy. The Canadian people are now spending \$600 million a year for medical care. At the very most this means the infusion of an additional \$80 million; and if the Minister of Finance says that \$80 million will cause inflation, he can curtail some of the government's expenditures to the tune of \$80 million.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rinfret): Order. I regret to interrupt the hon. member but the time allotted for his speech has expired.

Some hon. Members: Carry on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rinfret): Is there the unanimous consent of members of this house to enable the hon. member to continue his speech?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.