

Supply—Health and Welfare

accord to you all the facilities of the British health plan. If you are taken ill you can go to one of their hospitals; you can get medical or surgical or dental care, or optical care if necessary. The visitor to Britain is not asked to pay any bills.

I may say that when I visited Britain in 1948 I was presented with a yellow card and told that should I require medical attention I would be given free treatment if I presented the card. Subsequently I met the then British minister of health, Right Hon. Aneurin Bevan, and I said to him, "This is a strange idea, that you should accord these facilities without payment to visitors to Britain." He said to me with a smile, "Don't you think it is a nice welcome to the country? Don't you think it would be very nice if you fell ill and then went back to Canada with a memory perhaps of hospitality and courtesy?" I said, "Yes, that is all very well; but most of the people who come to Great Britain for a holiday could also afford to pay their bills." With a laugh he said, "As a matter of fact we went into that thoroughly and found that it would be much more expensive to set up the administrative machinery, print the forms and all the rest of it, distribute them to the hospitals and then engage in the collection of fees. We found it was more economical to give the service free and we are giving it free."

I know of a well-to-do gentleman who was taken ill while in Britain and sent to one of their hospitals. He did not realize that he would not get a bill. He said he had never had better hospital and medical treatment in his life than he got in that London hospital, and there was nothing for him to pay. I am not pleading that we should do that kind of thing for our visitors to Canada, but I am trying to show that the plan which was inaugurated over there is successful, and that every other democratic and progressive country in the world except Canada and the United States has some sort of national health plan.

Mr. Martin: Federal states.

Mr. Coldwell: Is not Switzerland a federal state?

Mr. Martin: Yes.

Mr. Coldwell: That was not a barrier in Switzerland.

Mr. Martin: It was a difficult barrier for a long time.

Mr. Coldwell: May I say to the minister and the government that they have had 36 years since this was promised to get over that barrier. Not only is it long past the time when the government should be attempting

[Mr. Coldwell.]

to remove any barriers; we should be having this measure before the House of Commons and adopting it. I think the minister knows that I have been interested in many of the policies that have come before this house, but this is the one of all those remaining in the field of social services that I want to see instituted while I am a member of this parliament—and I hope to be a member of this parliament for some years to come, I might say. But I would like to see it instituted. I would like to be here to give a word of praise to the minister who inaugurates it.

I shall be ready to give a word of praise if I feel it is warranted, as I did publicly for the Salk vaccine program. I think our Department of National Health and Welfare did a remarkable job, a job which compares most favourably with what was done in the United States under entirely different conditions and in a different manner. I am not going to say anything which will reflect on the Salk vaccine, but I did hear a rather disturbing story tonight in the news from the United Kingdom. However, that is by the way.

I want to impress upon the minister, I want to impress upon the government, and I want to impress upon the house that I hope at the next session of the House of Commons a bill will be introduced which will enable those provinces that want to come under the plan on a co-operative basis to do so. Such a plan should not be administered by the central government of Canada but by the provincial departments of health, very much as old age pensions were first administered. We do not want any more centralization, and we should not have that centralization because, as the minister says, this is a federal state. Each province has its own department of health which could administer a federal plan under which all the provinces could come.

I do not want to delay the house at this late stage of the session, but I simply could not let this occasion pass without once more pleading earnestly with the government and the minister. I know the minister is sympathetic to the point of view I have put forward. He should go out among his friends in the province of Ontario, he should use his influence within the government of Canada, so that within the next year we may have upon the statute books of this country a plan which will give an opportunity to all provinces who want to come under it to do so.

It may be said that we have not the hospitals, that we have not the nurses, that we have not the medical men. When the province of Saskatchewan introduced their hospital plan they had 3·4 or 3·8 hospital beds