

Medicare

Mr. Robert C. Coates (Cumberland): Mr. Speaker, on entering this debate I should first of all indicate my full support for the amendment that has been moved by the official opposition in regard to certain aspects of Bill No. C-227 and the kind of action that we feel should be taken in connection with a bill which according to its present form, will not come into effect, for 22 months at the earliest.

I should like to enter real objection to the fact that this house is being called upon to debate this piece of legislation at this time, while the old age pensioners and veterans of our nation have to wait and hope that the government will at some future date take the action that is necessary, and which has been necessary for some time, to revise and to increase their pensions. This action has been promised by the government, and these people have been waiting for many months.

This house has been requested by the government, through the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. MacEachen), to give passage to Bill No. C-227 while at the same time being informed that the legislation in question will not become effective before July 1, 1968 at the earliest, almost two years hence. Members of Parliament are being requested to give their approval to legislation that is useless by itself and can only be of value and benefit to the public if the governments of the ten provinces are willing to provide co-operation.

At the same time there has been no indication from the provincial governments of any sort of unanimous approval of the proposed plan as set out in the present bill. This is the situation that faces members today when debating a matter given first priority by the government, which allows many in need in this nation to wait, and wait, and wait, in order that they might get a bill through the house on a subject about which they have been making promises since 1919. Is it any wonder that Canadians become disgusted with this government and with the proceedings in this chamber. If the government cannot anticipate producing a program prior to July 1, 1968, why should we be asked in October of 1966 to provide them with the legislation, and certainly why should we be asked to provide them with such legislation before we have acted upon increases in old age security, veterans pensions and the like?

If this government were honest with the Canadian people in the matter of statements as to a recognition of need where it exists, it

would have acted on these pieces of legislation that would be of immediate assistance and allow legislation that might become effective at some future date to await an indication of need, before we are pressed to act. The amendment before the house at the present time recognizes the main criticisms of the present bill. It urges the federal government to secure the co-operation of the provincial governments. It eliminates the compulsory aspect of the legislation and gives the individual the freedom of choice he should expect as a citizen of a free nation. It urges that sufficient medical research and the training of adequate numbers of doctors and associated medical personnel be available when the bill does become effective, and it asks that those who are in need and are unable for financial reasons to provide medical services to themselves at the present time, receive these medical services.

The amendment in question is both responsible and reasonable and should be supported by members in all parties in this house. Hon. members should be wary to give the blanket approval of the bill this government asks for, when they consider the history of the government to date, and its actions on its proposals. There has never in this nation's history been a government which has turned more somersaults than the present administration. They ask us now to approve a bill which they hope will be in effect in July of 1968, if they are able to secure the co-operation of the provincial governments—something which is not evident at the present time.

I recall so well this government's asking us to pass legislation of an enabling nature on the 12 mile fishing limit. The legislation was passed and has been on the statute books of this nation for some years; yet it is as ineffectual today as it was the day it received passage. Is this bill to have the same fate? Is it to fit the description given it by Mr. Thompson, the leader of the Liberal party in Ontario—"The blank cheque that was written by the Liberal Party in 1919, that has been bouncing around ever since"? Are we to become co-conspirators with this government in deceiving the Canadian people into thinking that they are going to have a medical care program available simply because we have passed legislation in this house, when as members we know that many of the participating provinces are most unhappy about the kind of program envisaged by this bill, when we know that they indicate an unwillingness to join with the federal government