

The Budget—Mr. Weselak

Springfield, which I have the honour to represent and of which I am justifiably proud—the reasons for my pride in my constituency I will reserve for a later occasion—prior to the inauguration of the health plan we had no hospital within its confines except one located at Pine Falls at the northern end of its more populated area. As a result of the program we now have in Springfield a modern, well-equipped, 25-bed hospital at Beausejour and a well-equipped modern 10-bed nursing unit in Whitemouth. I might say in passing that the hospital in Beausejour has operated since 1949 without a deficit, despite the fact that per diem charges are far lower than those in city hospitals and that the services certainly are comparable. At the outset there was certain resistance to the plan to establish units in the area. However, the vote was favourable and, through the co-operation of the province and municipalities affected, these units became a reality.

There is one aspect of this particular scheme that deserves particular comment, namely the policy of putting the responsibility for construction and operation of these hospitals at the local level. My experience has been that while local boards flounder a bit in their inexperience, nevertheless the close financial limits within which they have to operate makes it necessary for them to get a dollar's value for each and every dollar which is available to them. In addition, these local boards contribute their time voluntarily and, I can assure you, unstintingly. The policy to which I have referred also has the effect of fostering a local pride in these units which is amply evidenced by the organization of local guilds which do a tremendous job towards providing the amenities which a budget-conscious board must overlook in an effort to provide the technical equipment and aids which are usually desired. The value of such services to a rural community can be assessed only by those who now have them but previously were without them. The saving in life, the saving in money and the conveniences which have been made available by these hospitals certainly have made well worth while the effort put into them by the various levels of government and by local boards.

In closing may I say that I believe we must all realize that we are in a period of transition from a wartime to a peacetime economy and that certain dislocations in our national economy are unavoidable. I am confident that given good leadership,—which, in my opinion, we have—the people of Canada will weather the adversities we now experience and that, despite the predictions of ruin, the future growth and wealth of Canada will well outstrip the record of the past.

[Mr. Weselak.]

Mr. E. D. Fulton (Kamloops): Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Dickey: Has the hon. member not spoken already?

Mr. Fulton: I think the hon. member for Halifax (Mr. Dickey) is getting confused. He usually speaks twice himself, but others do not follow that habit.

Mr. Dickey: Another joke?

Mr. Fulton: Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we heard made in this house an appeal for a restoration of good relations between the dominion and the provinces. That appeal was made directly to the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) but so far it has gone unanswered. I hope that before the house adjourns for the Easter recess some indication will be given to us whether the government of Canada regards seriously its pledges to the provinces and its responsibility not only to preserve the system of confederation but to make it more workable.

I am a little bit surprised that in the course of this debate today, no answer has yet been made to the statesmanlike appeal made by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Drew). I am a little bit surprised that no indication has been given whether the dominion government is prepared to meet the provinces and to sit down with them around the table in an effort to arrive at an agreement or in an effort to discuss the problems which prevent an agreement on these extremely important subjects which are at the moment outstanding matters of difference between the dominion and all the provinces. The reason I am surprised is that I recall the glowing phrases which were used by the Prime Minister and various other ministers of this government in connection with certain conferences which were held in the year 1950 when not only was it indicated that progress was being made in the matter of discussions of problems of this sort but that we were within an ace of getting an over-all agreement which would govern for all future time the relations between this central government and the provincial governments. I wonder a little bit whether the reason we have not had an answer from the Prime Minister so far or any indication from any other spokesman for the government is that they are afraid that their forecasts of the possibility of agreement are not capable of being realized. I wonder whether they are a little bit self-conscious, shall we say, about the basis which they themselves suggested for the meeting of that conference.

My mind goes back over the last few years since we have been here and I recall some of the statements that have been made by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Garson), that great