

Supply

a heart attack and had to lie on a stretcher for nearly a week. Why? Because of a chronic lack of beds.

Canadians are all aware of reports that at any given time, more than 1,000 people are on the waiting list for bypass surgery in Toronto.

In Quebec, people may wait up to eight or nine months for a bed. In Toronto, at the Hospital for Sick Children, 40 young patients had to wait up to eight months for open-heart surgery. Why? Because scheduled operations were constantly postponed due to a lack of beds. In most large cities, emergency wards often lack the capacity to take care of new patients. Why? Because of a constant lack of beds.

[*English*]

Emergency rooms in major cities often have no capacity to handle new patients because they do not have enough beds into which previous patients could be transferred. Wealthy Canadians, are choosing to go to the United States where they can receive immediate treatment for immediate cash.

It is small wonder that Canada's medicare system has fallen ill, for it has been so under-nourished since this government came to office in 1984. At that time Canadians took comfort in the Prime Minister's declaration that "medicare was a sacred trust". They now realize that they should have put their trust in someone else. Some may even remember the present finance minister saying in 1982 that cuts to Established Programs Financing could have disastrous effects on hospital funding and on their operation. He went on to preach:

Let us not make hospitals a battleground between the federal government and the provincial governments. Let us solve those problems not on the backs of hospitals, let us solve those problems outside of that arena.

• (1250)

When the minister took his new seat on the other side of the House, it is obvious he left his social conscience behind. Perhaps on election night he did not just see stars but saw stripes as well.

The Canadian medicare system has become the favourite target of Tory attacks since they took office in 1984. Cuts to Established Programs Financing have resulted in the inevitable destruction of the five principles of medicare. Universality, portability, accessibility, public admin-

istration, and comprehensiveness will all be an historical footnote if the Wilson fiscal knife is not dulled.

The spirit of the government's free trade agreement is embodied in its current medicare policy. We all remember American objections to our social program subsidies during the free trade negotiations. We also remember that the American Medical Association spent a great deal to dissuade the U.S. from ever adopting any kind of universal medicare.

According to polls, 60 to 80 per cent of the American public want the U.S. to copy the world-renowned system to which Canadians have become accustomed. The AMA is desperate to protect its \$600 billion a year business. Our Canadian example is the AMA's greatest enemy.

Under the guise of fiscal restraint, the ministers of this government continue to divest themselves of programs that even they once called sacred trusts. Most cherished of all social programs, medicare is now certainly under the knife on the Tory trade table.

While inept on most accounts, this government has excelled in the art of camouflaging its real agenda, thus being able to slowly divest the federal contribution to medicare. In 1984 the Prime Minister boasted that Canada is open for business. Sadly, we find ourselves in the midst of a fire sale, the value of our social programs being marked down year after year.

In order to avoid public wrath, the government is gradually and deceptively passing the vast majority of costs on to the provinces. Continuing to promote the reduced deficit they have failed to achieve for the past six years, medicare and other social programs continue to be scrapped for parts. Instead of investing resources and devising policies to create wealth in this country, this government has chosen instead to sell off our social assets.

As the party that introduced national medicare to Canada, our commitment is as strong today as it was in 1966. With any system, improvements must be made. This requires innovation, foresight and direction. We do not advocate that money be mindlessly spent throughout the system.

On February 26, 1991 the finance minister introduced a budget telling Canadians they must pay their own way. We have been paying his way for the last six years.