

Hon. Théogène Ricard (Saint-Hyacinthe-Bagoi): Mr. Speaker, I believe everyone in the house agrees as to the need for medicare. I would like to have the views of the expert on decent housing, the expert from Quebec East (Mr. Duquet), if he has anything to say on the subject. Everyone agrees upon the need for medicare, and admits it. We are told that one person out of three is unable to pay for medical treatment. This reason alone would justify the introduction of a medicare plan. But the urgency of such a plan must not lead us to forget the responsibilities and the rights of each of the participating members. We cannot ignore the rights of the provinces in this field, no more than we can ignore the priority of the provinces in the field of education. Public health, like education, is the exclusive responsibility of the provinces and, for this reason, we cannot do otherwise than recognize the fact that the piece of legislation at present before the house constitutes an infringement upon the rights and prerogatives of the provinces. This fact alone would justify immediate rejection of the legislation before us. But there are still other factors which support the objection which we may have to the bill in its present form.

Everyone knows that the present Liberal government is blackmailing the provincial governments. The present Liberal government not only trespasses in a provincial field, but takes it over and says: "Gentlemen of the provinces, here is the plan you need; this is the medicare plan which we have to offer. Take it or leave it."

Furthermore, I said that the Liberal or the central government was blackmailing the provinces. Yes, it is blackmailing them, Mr. Speaker, because it is luring them with millions which are to become theirs if they will promise to be gentle and accept the terms worked out by the Ottawa bureaucrats.

Mr. Speaker, such a situation has lasted long enough, and I think it is time we made it clear to the present ministers that they must stop this blackmail and stop treating the provinces as minors.

Mr. Speaker, less fortunate provinces certainly need assistance and this should be the starting point to determine the urgency of negotiations with the provinces.

Whoever has followed our discussions and the methods used to bring this bill before the house cannot but admit and realize that the provinces have not been consulted as they should have been.

Medicare

Mr. Speaker, as a result of Bill C-227, we are faced with an election promise made by the Liberals during the last election campaign and to prove my point, I have in hand an excerpt of the notes prepared for the speech made by the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) on September 21, 1965 along the same lines as the opening speech delivered by the Prime Minister at the Chateau Laurier.

On page 9 of the speech, the following can be read:

Our aim would be to have a comprehensive medicare scheme operating in Canada for the centennial of confederation, on July 1, 1967.

Other people referred to statements made by other ministers during the last election, which is evidence that that was an election promise made by the Liberals at that time. Hence the anxiety of those who have to implement this liberal promise as soon as possible. They have broken so many others that they want to keep at least a few, even if it means encroaching on provincial rights and prerogatives.

The measure now before the house is known by all. It was a cause for dissension not only within the Liberal party, but also within the Liberal cabinet. One has simply to refer to the caucus held upon the return to Canada of the right hon. Prime Minister from his trip to England to recall that the discussions between the members of the Liberal party were heated and acrid. A caucus was demanded to ask the right hon. Prime Minister for a report and for explanations as to why the implementation of medicare was delayed for at least one year.

● (9:40 p.m.)

The discussion was also bitter and acrimonious at the convention which took place last week in the Chateau Laurier. There were rumours of the resignation of some ministers. At times, it was mentioned that the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. MacEachen) would submit his resignation. It was said also that the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Marchand) would leave the cabinet, since he was displeased with the way he had been treated. In a word, this caused an uproar and a dispute beyond words among those who, in public, show a united front as if nothing had happened.

Mr. Choquette: Are you aware that there is some division inside the Conservative party?