

*Supply—Health and Welfare*

two other people in a forum on this subject. While I do not know for certain the political interests of one of those persons, I think it would be safe to say that generally speaking she was a supporter of the Liberal party. I know, too, that the other person had stood at one time in British Columbia as a provincial candidate for the Conservative party. And I had been elected only recently under the banner of the C.C.F.

In some preliminary discussion we agreed that we would get together one evening to discuss in rough outline how the forum would proceed. I had frankly expected to find that it would develop into a spirited debate, and that possibly I might be in a minority in my support of a national health program. To the surprise of all three of us, I believe, we discovered that we were in basic agreement on the question of a national health insurance plan for Canada. Only one question was raised, and that was the fear expressed by one member of the forum over the idea of developing a completely centralized plan. I think my leader made quite clear in his speech at the opening of this debate that the kind of plan he visualized would not be one which would be completely centralized here in Ottawa.

I happened to have with me at the time a copy of a draft bill which, I assume, was the result of the health insurance study referred to in this item. We went into the draft bill in some detail and, as a result, decided that the best manner to conduct the forum would be by way of a panel discussion of the various aspects outlined in that draft bill.

I have described this incident in some detail only to illustrate my conviction that the vast majority of people in British Columbia are completely convinced as to the value of and necessity for a national health insurance plan, and that it has gone beyond the point where there is any real division among the political parties on this question.

I was pleased earlier in the debate to hear my colleague from Kootenay West refer to the work done by the late Dr. Weir, when he was a minister in the British Columbia government. I share with the hon. member a high opinion of the work done by Dr. Weir.

It has been pointed out several times in this discussion that Canada is a federal state whereas the United Kingdom, to which my leader referred, is a unitary state. So far as I am concerned the fact that this is the nature of our constitutional set-up makes it all the more imperative that we develop a national health insurance plan. To my mind the nature of our constitutional organization is one of the strongest arguments for the plan, rather than against it.

Last night the hon. member for Peace River, when describing the difficulties he had encountered in connection with the birth of his baby in Ontario, proved conclusively the very point I have in mind. Since I have been in Ottawa I found myself in somewhat the same position, when I had occasion to place my young son in hospital for a few days. At least I can say I was better off than the hon. member for Peace River, in that the hospital insurance plan of British Columbia covered my bill even though I was temporarily in Ontario. Nevertheless there was a great deal of, to my mind, unnecessary red tape because of the fact that the bill was to be paid by Victoria to an Ottawa hospital. That red tape could have been eliminated if a national health insurance plan had been in operation, and if there had been proper co-operation in the matter of administrative details between the various governments involved.

There have been a few occasions during the time I have attended sessions of parliament when I have been made conscious of the fact that I live in a different province. There have been times during the course of debates when I have felt almost like an ambassador to the court of Ottawa from some far-distant, foreign land. There have not been too many, I am glad to say, but unfortunately there are occasions when a member from one of the far western provinces does tend to have that feeling. That, to me as a Canadian, is not a good feeling to have. Certainly while I was resident within the confines of British Columbia during the whole year I was a supporter of the national health insurance plan. But I must say that my own experience of having to spend a good part of the year away from my own province has, if anything, convinced me more strongly than ever of the necessity of getting on with the job of establishing this national health insurance plan.

One of the reasons it is important that due consideration be given to this subject at this time is that a dominion-provincial conference is slated for this autumn. Certainly I would join in the hope of my leader that as a result of the discussions that will take place there the Minister of National Health and Welfare will be able to introduce at the next session of parliament a bill which will put this plan into effect. I feel this is one subject in which there is no room whatever for the kind of false provincial pride that sometimes raises itself inside this chamber and in places outside. I think this is a matter which is so paramount to the interests and the well-being of the citizens of Canada from Newfoundland to Vancouver island that no petty considerations of constitutional jurisdiction should longer be allowed to stand in the way