

Medicare

Speaker, who, if he were to think long enough about it, would argue with me when I say that the people we should look after first of all are our own elderly people. I want to see such a provision put on paper, because I do not believe that in our big bureaucracy we do fill the need where it is greatest.

If, Mr. Speaker, we want to start curbing inflation, there are a great many places in Canada where we are wasting money, and wasting it in large lumps, no check being had upon it whatever. We have plenty of money to build islands in the middle of a river to hold a fair. I am not against that; but I do think we should work out some clear-cut ideas as to priorities in spending in this country. However, looking after the people who built this country is our first duty. Let the people who gave us these good times we are all so proud about be the first to have at least a minimum of security. In view of the cost of living today no one could possibly imagine that spending \$75 a month was living high on the hog; it barely pays the rent of any decent suite or flat in any of the cities I have lived in. What are these pensioners supposed to live on after that? If they have saved \$1,000 and they declare it—and the honest people do—then in most cases it beats them out of some forms of medicare.

I do not think it is at all contradictory, Mr. Speaker, to say that I am against compulsion in principle, but that we should also look after our elderly people, no matter what compulsion is used. I am certainly willing to submit to compulsion in that regard. If the only way I can be told to vote for this sort of thing is to compel me to vote, right and good; but you do not sell me the idea of medical care for all on a compulsory basis, all the way down the line.

The people in every province in Canada today have shown that they want medicare, but I am also quite sure that as the deadline of July 1, 1968 approaches the government will discover that the people of Canada are not going to swallow this plan hook, line and sinker. The government will have to change their terms of reference and put this particular castor oil in capsule form, or make one of their chocolate candies out of it.

We will never have communism in this country, Mr. Speaker, as long as the members of this chamber do their duty; but I do not think we can do our duty here unless we are frank with each other. I think we are getting into a morass because we are being cagey, hiding facts and promising that in the future

[Mr. Bigg.]

there will be some wonderful package deals. Then when the time comes, they do not appear.

This house is the place to discuss legislative proposals. The experience of the Canadian people over the last three years has been that we cannot get anything put on the statute books at present unless proposals are brought out into the open, and we who are here have a really good kick at them. On several occasions items of legislation have been withdrawn, Mr. Speaker, as you well know, and I compliment the government for taking that action. Having made a stupid mistake there was no point in compounding it. If you have laid an egg, stand back and admire it, by all means: But let us have a good look at it.

If voting against this bill meant that we would have a chance to review the whole question, then I would vote against the bill. I know perfectly well however that this bill is going to go through; but in voting for it, as I intend to, I am not to be taken as expressing approval of it in its present form. I wish I knew how I could make myself perfectly clear why I stand for certain features of the bill. I do not want to hold up medicare, but I want medicare introduced in a form that will do the most good.

● (6:00 p.m.)

I hope the government will do something about preparing the physical facilities and plant for medicare. In that connection I hope it will forget about austerity. If I am to believe what is said unanimously by the experts, our educators and medical men, then we in Canada are hopelessly behind in the amount of money we appropriate for research. Therefore I trust the government will make a real effort to provide more money for medical research.

I think we are also going to be hopelessly behind in hospital beds. We are already thousands of nurses behind. I raised this subject some five years ago, and begged the government of that day to put more money into the training of young nurses. This was turned down, not by the government of the day but by the nursing profession itself; so here is a place where some compulsion might well be used. We can no longer rely on the Florence Nightingale approach to nursing. It is now a highly skilled profession. We have to encourage our young people to enter it, because we will need more after medicare is implemented.

We should also do something to encourage our trained nurses to stay in Canada. I do not