

Medicare

separate. This is our request: that the federal government have a plan for nine provinces, which is perfect, if the federal government wants interfere in that field for the nine other provinces. But, at least, let the province of Quebec free to reject this intrusion and interference. There is no—

Mr. Racine: Can the hon. member for Lapointe tell us this, since he knows all about matters of provincial jurisdiction: provided the nine other provinces had medicare through federal channels, whether the province of Quebec would be prepared to grant the same social legislation to its citizens?

Mr. Grégoire: Actually, before the medicare plan comes into effect at the same time in the nine other provinces and in Quebec, we shall have to wait until July 1, 1968.

I think that it would be a good idea to get also some explanations from the Quebec government. I think that Quebec should also make known its priorities; I am not here to defend the opinions of the Quebec government in office at the present time. However, I believe that questions will be put to the Quebec government and that it might even be advisable to ask some in order to know when it will set up its own medicare program. However, I believe that Quebec must be assured of a fiscal equalization the day it would want to set up its own medicare program. We are asking for just that. This is not provided in the bill and the minister does not want to include it. This is why I object to the principle of that bill. And I do so on the ground that it is another interference, and because we do not want anymore the federal government to keep on interfering in matters such as those. Besides, we want Quebec to be the master of its own taxation so as to be able to administer its plan according to its wishes and its distinctive characteristics. That has always been denied by the federal government.

In conclusion, I should like to say today that instead of gradually improving in Ottawa, at least provides me, since I have openly declared myself for the independence of Quebec, with the best argument to the effect that instead of gradually improving in Ottawa, things are worsening. This debate provides me with the best argument to show my Quebec fellow-citizens that Ottawa is not only unwilling to understand, but that it is getting more involved in centralization, in the taking over of Quebec powers and privileges, and in the control of all the fields reserved up to now to the Quebec jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker, this further argument will allow me to show the people of Quebec that Quebec has only one solution and only one choice to make: to become independent.

• (7:50 p.m.)

[English]

Mr. Reid Scott (Danforth): We have before us in this legislation what has been described as one of the most important measures to come before parliament for some time. We in the New Democratic Party have already indicated our basic agreement with the plan, subject to some reservations which were outlined earlier by our leader and which he elaborated in the debate which is to follow.

It is not my intention at this stage to go into the technical aspects of the bill. This will be done by others who will follow me. I am more interested in the change which has been made in the commencement date and the reasons advanced for such a change, together with the interesting light this casts on the sincerity of the minister, his colleagues in the cabinet and all those backbenchers who misled the country in the last election and who, by their actions now, have betrayed the promises they made.

It is unnecessary to say anything further about the need for medicare in this country. The Hall Commission adequately set out the need for this type of service. Nobody in the house has denied that there is a necessity for a plan of this kind. Some members of the Conservative opposition—it would appear from what has been said that the Conservative party is opposed to medicare—have raised the question of the cost of the scheme, and suggested we cannot have it because it will be too costly. I suggest to them that they re-read the Hall Commission report which establishes the cost of the plan, sets out the means by which it can be financed and makes the point that Canada is more than able to afford it.

Then again, Conservative critics of the bill are failing to look at the other side of the coin, which is the cost of sickness to Canada. For example, it is estimated that in 1963, the latest for which statistics are available, 100 million man days of labour were lost to our labour force through illness, with a consequent economic loss of \$1,630 million or 3.8 per cent of our gross national product for one year.

All this sickness could not, of course, have been prevented by medicare, but these figures do indicate the tremendous economic loss which Canada suffers because we do not have