

Mr. Saltsman: In view of the fact that the federal government made a great point, in connection with its prices and incomes policy, that it really needed the consent of all the provinces for the program to work, and has carried out enormous propaganda aimed at getting the provinces to help it—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member will understand why I hesitated to allow a further question. He appears now to be affirming something. If he wishes to ask a direct question he may do so as far as the Standing Order permits, but this is not the time or the place to make affirmations and ask an hon. member to comment on them.

Mr. Saltsman: One of the difficulties about being here any longer than two years is that the boundary between statements and questions becomes somewhat blurred. However, I will try to restore the distinction and ask a question directly. Can the hon. member explain why the federal government should have insisted on co-operation in one area while refusing to extend that co-operation in the area of medicare?

Mr. Broadbent: The answer is clear. The Liberal party has a long history of duplicity.

[Translation]

Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, it is essential that hon. members consider Bill C-68 through which the Canadian government is amending the present medicare legislation. Mr. Speaker, although this legislation is not very extensive, it is meant to alter substantially the universal medical protection scheme in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is important for two basic reasons. It questions again the sharing of responsibilities and powers among the various levels of government in Canada, both federal and provincial; it also questions the cost sharing of those programs. This means that since we live in a federal system, this sharing must be done after many intensive and effective negotiations between both levels of government directly concerned in such a bill.

Before talking about the substance of this bill, I would like to say to the government and to the minister who introduced this bill that I cannot support its approach which aims at imposing unilaterally a new cost and responsibility sharing formula, and I would like to emphasize the word unilaterally.

I am well aware that the minister and the government spokesmen say that there have been numerous discussions at the provincial level, but with what results, Mr. Speaker? Can the government table tonight copies of the agreements that have been made to support the administrative aspects or the principles of Bill C-68?

Mr. Speaker, in the past, when we had such debates in this House, government members emphasized the advantages of federalism and especially the importance of the great social philosophy of the Liberal party. Mr. Speaker, without the Liberal policy, we would not have the social assistance programs that we have in Quebec, we would not have medicare, and many social security programs would not exist if it were not for the wonderful Liberal party. I am sorry to say this, Mr. Speaker, but I say so in a non-partisan manner since it is the truth.

Medical Care Act

Tonight, we are asked to pass a bill which aims at reducing the federal financial responsibility towards a program which the federal government itself forced us to accept originally. How can the government ask us today to contribute less to a program that it implemented itself when, at the beginning, Mr. Speaker, Ottawa and the provinces had not agreed that there would be subsequently a unilateral revision and cost distribution?

This is the constitutional aspect of Bill C-68 which can certainly cause vigorous protest in the House by those who are more provincialist than federalist. The fact remains that this little ball game, this constitutional game is being played and varies according to the political situation of the day, whether it is profitable or not. Mr. Speaker, this is being conducted on the back of Canadians. A great truth which I believe everyone agrees with is that regardless who pays for medicare costs, whether it is Ottawa or the provinces, it always comes out of the taxpayers' pocket.

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In the financial system in which we live and which is protected by the present governments, they have only two sources of revenue—loans and taxation. In the case of loans, again Canadians have to pay a surtax to reimburse capital and interests, in the case of taxation, again the citizens have to pay. Finally, this bill says if it is passed, that the federal government will pay 50 per cent of certain costs mentioned in the explanatory notes. It is not the federal government that will do that. The federal government is only the medium; or very often the government thinks it is God; thanks to it, we have grants and without it we would have nothing.

Mr. Speaker, that is not true. It is a falsehood politicians put in the heads of people. It is not the federal government, no matter how big, powerful and Liberal it is, that pays for medical care. It is taxpayers. Let us stop once and for all that constitutional game which divides Canada and which raises the provinces against the federal government and the federal government against the provinces. And finally, what everybody forgets to say is that it is always the taxpayer, no matter who administers him, the province of Quebec, Ottawa, Toronto or Edmonton, that finally foots the bill and receives the care that is very often inadequate in some hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, medicare is not such a wonderful thing. It is a tremendous thing, a step forward, of course. But everyone will agree with me that it is very costly, and that it did not necessarily improve the quality of the services.

It merely allowed services to be more accessible to people to whom they were formerly denied because of prohibitive prices. But that did not improve the quality of the services. I know many a citizen in Victoriaville or elsewhere, in Drummondville as well as Quebec, who has to queue at the emergency of large hospitals waiting for quality care, and who continue to wait. The doctors do what they can. The nurses and hospital staff also do what they can, but money does not necessarily buy quality services.

In any event, I feel that it is important to stress that with the type of administrators we have in our Canadian federal system, we will always have conflicts because we take provocative stands. This evening, the government