

Royal Commission on Health Standards

House of Commons and the Senate of Canada has elicited replies which indicate a lively interest and I infer that the appointment of a commission such as we are suggesting would receive the support of parliament.

I would assure you that a study undertaken under a royal commission would receive such aid and co-operation as this association is able to render and that the medical profession would welcome the opportunity of providing information based on its experience and its obvious interest in all phases of health.

Yours sincerely,

A. D. Kelly
General Secretary

The government has decided, on the basis of the representations it has received from quite a wide area of Canadians, economic and other groups, to set up a royal commission, the scope of whose authority and the personnel to be announced early in the new year. I cannot say exactly the date on which the commission will be set up to make this study, but I would hope that very soon after the holiday period the announcement can be made.

Hon. Paul Martin (Essex East): Mr. Speaker, one will have to draw one's own conclusions from the announcement made by the Prime Minister, an announcement that normally might have been made by the Minister of National Health and Welfare. The Prime Minister reminds the house that the general secretary of the Canadian Medical Association, Dr. Arthur Kelly, has written offering the services of the association in connection with the proposed study to be made by a royal commission. I would remind the house that two years ago the Canadian national welfare council, in representations made to the present government, urged that a body of this sort be appointed for the specific purpose mentioned by the Prime Minister and also to review generally social welfare measures on federal account now part of the law of this country.

The Prime Minister has decided that we are to have a study of this phase of medical care insurance through the medium of a royal commission. I would point out to the minister that it is open to the government itself to take a step in the field of medical care insurance, in co-operation with the provinces, without resorting to the intervention of the well known vehicle which this government is now seeking to employ, namely a royal commission. This will be at least the twelfth such instrument which the government has used for the promulgation of its ideas and policies. The government might well have embarked upon a specific plan of medical care insurance, just as the former government did with regard to hospital insurance,

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

which was enacted in this house without the prior intervention of a royal commission.

In any event, I would ask the Prime Minister, not today but at the earliest opportunity in the future, to give us some assurance that, in the appointment of a royal commission to investigate this important matter affecting the health and welfare of the Canadian people, this device will not be employed for the purpose of delay or postponement. There is a good precedent for my observation, because the Prime Minister gave the Canadian people assurance in January, 1958 that something was going to be done about adopting in this country a system of old age pensions similar to that in force in the United States. For this purpose a study was made that was to be completed in four months, but which has been under continuous study by the studious Minister of National Health and Welfare—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think the hon. member is going into the debating aspects of this question when he draws parallels with other acts of the government. I would ask him if he would stick to the non-contentious comments on the statement made.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): We have our views, sir, as to whether or not my observations are in order. I submit to you with great confidence that I have a right to point out that this very device was used by the Prime Minister in another field of social welfare on another occasion. I am simply expressing the hope that the use of a royal commission in this instance will not mean a delay in the implementation of what I believe the people of Canada are now looking for, that is legislation by this parliament, in co-operation with the provincial governments, that will see to it that no Canadian suffers the want of medical care on the mere ground of financial incapacity. I hope this announcement by the government means action by the government, and not postponement and procrastination.

Mr. Hazen Argue (Assiniboia): This seems to be a day for the announcement of new policies by the two major parties in the house. The Prime Minister has announced a royal commission in this very important field, while the hon. member for Essex East has now gone far ahead of any pronouncements by his party on this subject, and has left other members of his party, including the Saskatchewan leader, far, far in the rear.

I am confident that the Prime Minister's announcement is merely another indication that the people of Canada are anxious to have the benefits of a national health insurance program at the earliest possible date. I have already said in this house this week on this