

Medicare

to all; it will show that the federal government is not interested merely in constitutional controversy but also in giving back to the citizens what belongs to them, namely their health.

• (3:30 p.m.)

[English]

Mr. J. H. Horner (Acadia): I rise with some hesitancy to take part in this debate. Frankly I am puzzled that we as legislators should be asked to make a decision, now, on a plan which will not come into effect until 1968?

A few weeks ago we heard the Minister of Finance (Mr. Sharp) enlarging on his reasons for contemplating the introduction of what some people term a baby budget. He said that from time to time governments are obliged to establish priorities in respect to legislation. I think we would all agree with that. I ask this question: How, and in what order of priorities, are we to deal today with a bill which is not to take effect until 1968, almost two years hence?

All across this country people are wondering why parliament is not getting down to business. As we travel across Canada we hear people saying that this house is doing very little and that it is high time it got down to work.

Today we are being asked to debate a program of far reaching significance which is not to become effective until July 1, 1968. Surely the people of Canada are not likely to think we are really doing something of benefit for them? I can think of many pieces of legislation with which this house should proceed in preference to the bill now before us. When we consider the social needs of the public we should surely consider the position of senior citizens who are being asked to live in a climate of increasing prices on pensions which do not meet their needs. Why does the government not set up a list of priorities and come forward with legislation allowing senior citizens to receive the increase they have been tentatively promised? The carrot has been held out. It will be available, they are told, some time this fall. Why is the government not proceeding with this measure instead of with legislation the results of which will not be available for two years?

There are other fields in which legislative action is necessary. We should consider the situation of veterans, disabled people, and others in similar categories whose incomes do not allow them to enjoy a reasonable standard of living in these days of rapidly rising costs. Canadians throughout this country find

[Mr. Isabelle.]

themselves in strait-jackets because of the inflationary policies followed by the present government. The fact that so little urgency attaches to the present debate indicates poor management on the part of the government, and I am sure the public generally, considering these circumstances, will come to the conclusion that once again this house is doing very little by way of social legislation to bring immediate relief to those most in need.

I am tempted to think that no other legislation is ready for submission, and that the present measure is before us merely because it has been ready for a long time. Let us consider some of the other things which should be done in this field before legislation is undertaken. Surely when such a bill as this is drafted the government in office should strive to bring about some degree of co-operation and understanding with the provinces?

The measure before us cannot be implemented in the absence of direct co-operation from the provinces. But what do we find? We find that provinces are at cross purposes. The province of Alberta from which I come does not like this bill at all. Ontario is lukewarm toward it. Mr. Roblin said a few weeks ago that he was pleased the government had decided to hold up the legislation until 1968, at which time Canada could take a better look at it and the provinces could decide whether or not they would go along with it. By failing to reach some degree of agreement with the provinces on this legislation before bringing it into the house, the government has been derelict in its duties.

The medicare scheme now operating in Alberta will not fall within the confines of this legislation. Hon. members might ask why this should be so. The onus is on the government to seek provincial co-operation and agreement whenever legislation which concerns the jurisdiction of the provinces is concerned, as is certainly the case in this instance. Anyone coming from Alberta can readily see that this government has not gone to any real trouble to achieve any significant degree of co-operation with that province, at least.

• (3:40 p.m.)

Today we are living in a rapidly changing society, a society in which one thing may not be a crying need at the moment but tomorrow will become one, a society which, during my short time in this House of Commons, has greatly changed and speeded up. I am sure hon. members will agree that we are living in a fast moving society. If we accept this, then