

Medicare

going to be 48 years, and they have now put it off to 49 years. Why don't they wait until August 6, 1969, at 11 p.m. precisely? If they do so, it will be exactly 50 years from the time the Liberal convention in 1919 passed the resolution that had been moved by one W. L. Mackenzie King and seconded by one Arthur Roebuck.

Mr. Baldwin: Why not make it a centennial project?

Mr. Knowles: I believe it would be nice to do it while at least one of the sponsors of the original motion is still around, but perhaps Arthur Roebuck will be around for another 50 years. Why was this change made? We know the first reason given by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Sharp), which was that it was part of his program to battle inflation. That argument has been characterized as nonsense by just about everybody but the Minister of Finance—and he too probably knows that it is nonsense. After all, medicare does not involve that large an expenditure of new money that it plays any part whatsoever in inflation. But even the Minister of Finance has shifted his ground. He has been pressed by Liberals in caucus or at conventions, pressed by newspaper people and so on, and has given other reasons. He told us on one occasion that it was a matter of priorities. On one occasion he held up the blue book of estimates and asked, "What items do you want us to cut out so we can put the money into medicare?"

The minister then trotted out old age pensions and asked what it was to be, an increase in old age pensions or medicare. The old age pension increase about which the minister was talking could be paid in full out of the old age security fund. On the question of priorities I would suggest that colour television might have waited if we had wanted to save money, the national defence building that will blot out the parliament buildings could have waited, or the construction of the second trans-Canada pipe line in northern Ontario could have been insisted on, rather than letting it go the the United States. But the government has to pick out medicare, something which our people seriously need, and put it at the bottom of the list of priorities. It is too bad that the Minister of Finance is not here. I hope he will be here before the debate is over, and this gives him lots of time because it is going for quite a while yet. I hope the minister will take part

[Mr. Knowles.]

in this debate and tell us his part in connection with medicare legislation. I hope the Prime Minister will speak on this matter which should be a major concern to the government. I suggest that the Minister of Finance perhaps came closer to the truth when, as reported in one newspaper, he said that not only was it because of inflation and these other reasons but the government had to demonstrate to the business community that it is responsible. I submit that he was getting close to the reason there, namely, that the Minister of Finance is more concerned about his relations with the business community than he is about the needs of the people of this country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Knowles: As a matter of fact, all of us remember that during the election campaign the hon. member for York-Scarborough (Mr. Stanbury), the hon. member for Hamilton East (Mr. Munro), the Minister of National Health and Welfare, the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Hellyer) were saying we would have medicare by July 1, 1967. What did the then minister of trade and commerce, now the Minister of Finance, say during the last week of the campaign? He said he was just expressing his own personal view, but he said this might not be possible because there might not be enough doctors and money and medicare might have to be put off for another year or two. The truth is coming out. The big power in this government so far as anything that costs money is concerned is the Minister of Finance. Even when all the other big-shot Liberals were telling the country in the election campaign that we were going to have medicare by July 1, 1967, he was casting doubt on this promise. No wonder the Minister of National Health and Welfare on July 14, in the committee to which I referred a few moments ago, when I said medicare had three or four months to be kicked around replied to me with those plaintive two words, "I know".

I say, Mr. Speaker, that this is a sad day for Canada because of the utter disregard of the needs of our people involved in this callous action on the part of the government. Our people are suffering in many ways. The rising cost of living is having a very serious effect on the health and well-being of our people. The government has to do something about this. One of the things governments can do to improve the lot of the people is