

*Medicare*

Surely the principle outlined by Mr. Mackenzie King, that consultation is absolutely necessary, should be upheld. When one considers that according to the present government time is not of the essence in bringing about this legislation, it becomes clear that there is no rush in giving full consideration to this matter.

● (5:40 p.m.)

At the present time there is a conference of the premiers taking place. Why could not this measure be thoroughly discussed there? Why could not we, as the legislators of this country, have an opportunity of ascertaining just exactly what is going to be put in this bill, and how far reaching it is going to be, when it touches something so important as our health, and the health of our families? Now is the time to discuss this principle because, as you well know, it is much easier to put a bill through properly and have it work properly, than to try to undo mistakes. Once a government puts something on the statute books, it becomes very nearly sacred. The criticism can always be made: Well, you passed it in parliament. I have heard that criticism in Alberta with regard to the pension plan. They say I voted for the pension plan—and I did. It is very difficult to get a black and white question or a black and white answer here in parliament. Those who draw up bills and make policies always put a little bit of honey in with the vinegar.

When you want to sell compulsion, you talk about universality. When you want to sell an idea to the working people of Canada, you talk about capitalism and say that it is only the rich men in Canada who want to do this. I can tell you that I am not a rich man. I have been a workingman all of my life, and I know the need for having your bones mended if you fall off a scaffold. I know the need for a person to be fixed up so he can join the ranks of the workers and pull his weight in the boat. Most of the people in Canada want to pull their weight in the boat. They do have to be herded into this situation, pushed into it or cajoled into it. The people of Canada today are becoming much better informed. They know about this mixing of honey with vinegar. The people I represent—and I think on every occasion, we should speak for the people we represent—do not like compulsion. They certainly do not like it as a principle. I know they will put up with certain compulsory features. As I have said, taxation is compulsory. There are bad features and good features about taxation.

[Mr. Bigg.]

It is our job to thresh out these matters here. I think the former administration under the right hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Diefenbaker) was the finest government Canada ever had. When we lost the confidence of the public, we accepted that very well. We said: We cannot be the government, but we are certainly going to be the best opposition this country ever had. During the last three years every time the Liberals introduced one of their half-baked, poorly thought out pieces of legislation, or budgets that would not work, we worked hard, but not acrimoniously, to put forward our suggestions. I am putting forward my suggestions today in a spirit, you may say, of solid criticism, but also in a spirit of co-operation.

I will tell you this now: I intend to vote for this bill. I am going to vote for it, even though I know there is a need to amend it. I certainly have not changed my opinion that this bill needs amending, and it needs a great deal of amending. I can only hope—and I will tell you it is a thin hope that when the premiers get together to discuss this matter around the bargaining table they will be able to do what we have been unable to do here, that is, give the people of Canada medical care in a way that is acceptable to them, and in particular acceptable to the provinces.

I did not like the pension bill but, as I have said, I voted for it because it reduced the retiring age of labouring people. The pension bill contained this same principle of compulsion for the common good; but the net result was that the pension bill did not provide universal coverage. One of the criticisms I have heard most often during the last two years has been made by the farmers of my area who have asked why they, who probably need this pension scheme most, will gain the least. If the government wished to use compulsion as the excuse for giving universal coverage on medicare, then perhaps it should have introduced a bill that would be universally applicable. However, I do not see that feature in this bill. I see only a vague sort of compulsion; and a compulsion which is not spelled out is worse because it is an unknown feature.

If the government said it would take the Saskatchewan form of medicare as a base, then we could go out there and talk to the people, to see how it works. A great many people in Saskatchewan have accepted it because they believe, as I do, that health is very important, and you accept it on whatever basis you can get it. But certainly I do not believe that is any argument for ramming