

Medical Care Act

will be an election before that time and this proposal can be looked at in a much more constructive way.

● (1500)

Bearing in mind that the medical care program, having seduced or by mental enticement got all the provinces involved, some against their will, more than ten years ago, the government's unilateral withdrawal has done a great disservice to federal-provincial relations. This is one of the reasons why there is great reluctance in many provincial capitals about approving the Prime Minister's pet project of patriating the constitution and bringing back the BNA Act so that Canada can finally be a full-fledged nation in his eyes.

I do not think the Prime Minister fully appreciates the fundamental lack of faith or confidence that Canadians have, extending even to provincial governments of the same political stripe, and there are a few of those left across the country, a couple in Atlantic Canada, and they will rue the day down there; you do not have to be in Atlantic Canada very long before turning on the TV and finding the Liberal premier of Prince Edward Island or Nova Scotia saying things that might have come right from the front benches of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. That is the type of thing which is going on because of that unilateral approach, quite apart from the details of this bill and how they will affect a program as fundamental as medicare.

I do not want to take too much of the time of the House right now. I can understand very well any admonition that we should move on to the point. All I can do is to conclude more or less where I began. A fellow called the right hon. Wee Willie Mackenzie King who used to look at crystal balls for guidance, so we are told, did lead this country into some very emancipated social legislation of which Liberals have every right to be proud, notwithstanding the very genial Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Communications (Mr. Fleming). Long before he was born, the Liberal party, like the Conservative party, had in its platform something called medicare, which the Liberals supposedly first put forward in 1914.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): It was 1919.

Mr. Nowlan: I don't want to go back that far. I was not even born then. The fact is that some time thereafter Mackenzie King, looking in his crystal ball and getting advice from all sources, did talk about a medicare program, and the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. MacFarlane), as a Liberal member and a sincere one at that, must really wonder whether this is true liberalism in the true sense of the word, with a small "l", when you go back on a program you said you believed in since 1919, one you talked about at election after election. Mackenzie King, looking down here from above through the crystal ball on another one-way mirror would be shaking his head in shame at what the present so-called Liberal party is doing.

Mr. Cyril Symes (Sault Ste. Marie): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-68 has many lessons for the Canadian people. One of them surely must be that you cannot trust a Liberal.

In the 1974 general election many workers voted Liberal because the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) swore up and

[Mr. Nowlan.]

down and across the country that wage and price controls were wrong, discriminatory, and ineffective. A few months after he was re-elected he went back on his word and introduced a wage and wage control program—it was not a wage and price control program. And the people were betrayed. In this bill the provinces, and ultimately the people, will be betrayed in another fundamental way. The provinces are betrayed because the federal government has gone back on a solemn pledge to pay half the cost of medicare, and the people are betrayed because if and when this bill passes they will receive a kind of medicare inferior to that to which they have been accustomed. It is a backward step, but it is consistent with the actions of a government which lacks commitment to the legislation it undertakes.

The Liberals sniff the wind, discover which way it is going, and then jump on the bandwagon. In this case the bandwagon is one which will strike a sour note as the Canadian people realize what is being done to the standard of health care they have enjoyed in the past.

We in this party have fought tooth and nail against this legislation because of its discriminatory, negative implications not only for Confederation and the principle of equality of treatment from east to west, but because of what it will do to standards of health care especially as they apply to low-income Canadians. For years and years this party and its predecessor, the CCF, fought to bring about a program of universal hospital and medical care so that Canadians, irrespective of their financial situation, could have access to one of the most fundamental human rights, the right to good health care. Surely this is the measure of any civilized society; we do not say there shall be one standard of health care for those who can afford it and another for those who cannot.

It was a premier of Saskatchewan, my hon. friend from Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands, who led the fight for this principle. First they had universal free hospital care across the province, and then medicare. He fought against tremendous odds, tremendous pressures by medical lobbies and others. He even faced personal defeat believing that his cause was right. We carry on that fight today because we believe the principle of medicare, having taken so long to become established, ought not now to be undermined by the government with its lack of commitment to human rights.

I was proud to say I was a Canadian and to point to our medicare program and say to any visitor that it was one of the finest in the world. If this bill passes I shall no longer be able to do that; I shall no longer be able to say to the five million people in this country who live below the poverty line that they can expect adequate health care. The result of this bill will be that provinces will no longer be able to staff and maintain the system of health and medical care to which we are accustomed without implementing fees to be imposed every time a person visits a doctor, or, on the other hand, raising taxes to maintain the standard of the program at its present level. It is an indication to me that the government, when it comes down to the crunch, always puts the dollar sign before the welfare of the ordinary Canadian.