

Medicare

adequate reasons for delaying it, but I am rather disturbed by the fact that promises in respect of medicare have had a very serious effect on the thinking of some of our people, particularly at election times. I have in mind particularly the experience of my own province where a provincial election was held this summer during which time promises in respect of medicare were blatantly flouted. It is my conviction that this did have quite an influence on the voters and that partially as a result of their belief that medicare would be put into effect they elected a Liberal government in Prince Edward Island.

It is also rather interesting to note that after the results of that election had been declared the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) told the people of Prince Edward Island that medicare was coming into effect. He had just made a trip to Newfoundland and he decided to visit Summerside to congratulate the new Liberal premier. During the course of the conversation with Mr. Campbell I understand he said: "We cannot stay too long; we are in a hurry to get back as we are putting through medicare tonight." That was on July 13, but apparently "tonight" is not going to arrive until July 1, 1968.

It is also rather surprising that the government and the minister have not consulted to a greater extent with the Canadian Medical Association before the introduction of this bill for second reading. I understand the minister promised the executive of the Canadian Medical Association that before this bill was presented for second reading in this house he would confer with the executive officers of that association. I understand this association asked for this conference just days before the bill was actually introduced, and it was set for October 17.

Let me make it abundantly clear that I believe in the principles of medicare and it is most unfair of any member of this house, including the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis), to suggest that merely because we stand up on this side to propose what we feel are improvements to the bill we are against medicare. Because we on this side suggest how we think the bill could be improved does not necessarily mean we are opposed to the principles.

I am in favour of the principles of medicare because I think it is in the public interest that medical service insurance be made available to Canadians. However, I cannot go along with the inflexibility of the

requirements for participation as outlined in the bill before us.

A statement made by a past president of the London, Ontario, chamber of commerce impressed me and I should like to repeat it at this time. He said:

A little flexibility in the federal government's approach to a nation-wide medical care scheme would enable the provinces to develop plans best suited to the needs of their own people.

That seems to sum up the situation very well. There must be a more rational approach which will allow provinces to decide the form of the plan they wish to introduce. That is particularly important in those provinces which feel at the present time that they cannot afford to institute a plan to cover all their residents. The minister recognized this problem when he spoke in the house on July 12, 1966, as reported at page 7546. At that time he said:

At the same time not all of the provinces have the same fiscal capability of providing such programs or of meeting the costs of programs designed for all residents. Thus, although Canada is one country a Canadian resident of one province may be at a distinct disadvantage when compared with a Canadian resident of another province.

That suggests the exact situation in which my province finds itself at the present time so far as medicare is concerned. As closely as I can estimate, the cost of a medicare program in Prince Edward Island on the basis of the requirements set out in this bill would be \$1½ million. This money would have to come from the people of our province whose per capita income is the lowest of any province in Canada.

I have before me a report of the Economic Council of Canada which I think will give hon. members an idea of the problems we must meet in the Atlantic provinces. This study revealed that the average earned income per capita in the Atlantic region was 34 per cent below the national average, 47 per cent below British Columbia and a staggering 52 per cent below Ontario.

Translated into dollars and cents, these percentages mean that while employees in the Atlantic provinces receive an annual wage of \$3,033 the national average is \$3,810. In Prince Edward Island the situation is even more acute because our average weekly wage is \$63.06 as compared with the Canadian average of \$93.51. Can our province therefore afford to go further in debt in order to provide a comprehensive medical scheme? Right now we have a total debt, direct and indirect, of something of the order of \$60 million or about \$555 per capita.