

*Medicare*

been able to draw from all this material that a public medical care plan is not desirable. However, Mr. Speaker, I get the impression that most members are more or less coming to the point of view that it would in fact be desirable if a public medical plan were implemented in this country. The difference of opinion seems to be on matters of method and degree.

For my part, having given this matter consideration over a number of years, I say unequivocally that I support the concept of a public medical care plan that is based on the principle of universal coverage and on the assumption that it will be the greatest value for the tax dollar if it is administered by a public agency. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, my position on the issue before us is quite clear. But much more must be said with regard to many of the points of view that have been put forward up to now. The contention has been put forward by some hon. members of course that the desirability or efficacy of a public medical care plan is far from proven. However, we do have the Hall Commission report, which states quite clearly its findings and recommendations. In addition to this report there is ancillary material. Also, it is not difficult to find evidence from other countries to the effect that where such a plan has been implemented it is working out in a way that is acceptable to a majority of the people.

There are those who say that in the United Kingdom the national health plan has presented many problems and contains many deficiencies. Of course this would have to be conceded; but for the most part things have not been deteriorating in that country with respect to health care. A relatively short time ago I recall reading an article in the *Financial Post* to the effect that the doctor population ratio was actually improving and had been improving in the past decade and a half, contrary to the impression left by some hon. members who have made much of the fact that there has been a fairly substantial emigration by doctors from the United Kingdom to North America. The fact is that the doctor population ratio has improved; the medical schools are full and graduates are coming out of medical training institutions to carry out their profession.

It is my understanding that, ideally at least, debate on second reading of a bill should focus on the issue and concentrate on the principle involved in the particular piece

[Mr. Schreyer.]

of legislation under discussion. Debate on second reading is supposed to help in clearing up misunderstanding or confusion. I am not sure that this has been the case at all with respect to the bill before us. I think it can be said, without appearing immodest, that in so far as our group is concerned we have stated our position quite clearly, namely, that we favour a public medical care plan based upon the same principles that were enunciated by the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. MacEachen) on many occasions in the past two years. But now the government has seen fit to delay the implementation of the program and really has not—and I think it is germane to debate this point on second reading—indicated just what is the real reason for the delay.

It is true that we have been told by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Sharp) and his supporters that the reason has to do with the connection between the implementation of a medicare program and inflation, the implication being that there is a causal connection between the implementation of this program and inflation. But, Mr. Speaker, such a statement coming from the Minister of Finance, without any elaboration, is just not good enough. His mere saying so does not give us the real reason. If the government was really sincere in postponement of medicare on the basis of the inflation problem, it should through its Minister of Finance have taken the time and made the effort to elaborate in complete detail on just what is the connection.

Many members who have spoken in this debate have touched upon this, in my opinion, spurious argument that has been put forward by the supporters of further delay. Some editorial writers have analyzed this apparent reason and have held it up to the ridicule it really deserves. I believe it is still not too late to expect from the government some real explanation of the delay.

It is my opinion that this program has been delayed for political reasons. The government has found that it would require a considerable amount of fortitude to press on with the program in the light of recent attitudes and thinking on the part of various provincial governments. Therefore, rather than stand up to this opposition from whatever source, the government has decided to retreat; and not just retreat with respect to the time factor,