

Medicare

time the program comes into effect, I only hope that this might in fact be done so that parliament, the government, and the country might have the benefit of the views of this body. I do not agree with the Minister of Finance (Mr. Sharp), who says there is an inflationary aspect to the delay. Merely because the coming into effect of a program of this kind is going to be delayed for 20 months rather than eight months, with a possibility that the moneys which will be required to pay for this program will not be reflected in the tax structure until the year afterward cannot, I think, be accepted as a valid reason or excuse for delaying the implementation of such a program as this which parliament may ultimately pass. However, if there is to be this delay I suggest that the minister and the government might well give consideration to the proposal I made.

• (8:20 p.m.)

Some suggestion was made about the reference of this bill to a committee after second reading. I note that while the minister in response to a question said this would not be done, the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) this afternoon rather indicated that the bill might be referred to a committee. I have in mind however that the Prime Minister probably was not giving his attention to it and that the Minister of National Health and Welfare, in his statement that there would not be a reference to a committee, was indicating what would happen.

I felt initially that reference of the bill to a committee was desirable. It is true enough that hon. members to my left have pointed out that this issue has been discussed exhaustively by a royal commission which made a complete and detailed study, and whose report is a persuasive and enlightening document. I do not necessarily accept all that is in the report, but it certainly has made a notable contribution to the social writings and philosophy of our country. But despite that, as a matter of principle it has been my view that at no time is it possible for parliament to substitute for its judgment the judgment of a royal commission. The terms of reference of a royal commission, the evidence, report and recommendations are useful and valuable material from which we can reach our own opinions, give our own judgment and assess the negative and positive values of any particular program; but I think it must be laid down as a principle that it is quite wrong to say that merely because the matter has been considered by a royal commission which has

[Mr. Baldwin.]

made a report, and a good one, we must accept that report in its complete finality.

My views as to the necessity of bringing this matter before a committee have been changed since that time. We have heard in this house a statement by a responsible minister which leads me to question the virtues of the committees system, as we have been experimenting with it this year and last year. I refer to the statement made by the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Hellyer), in another context, that departmental witnesses appearing before a committee only do so with the consent of the minister, and their evidence must be limited to the views of the department in question.

Mr. Woolliams: You mean tampered with.

Mr. Baldwin: This is a serious position. This is a very grave challenge to the value and virtue of the committees system. So long as it persists, and until such time as it has been clarified and a statement made on behalf of the government, I am reluctant to waste the time of this house by referring to any committee any matter of any consequence. Surely we are entitled to have and to demand that any witness, no matter whether he be a departmental witness, a serving officer or one who has retired, must be allowed to give evidence when subpoenaed, and his evidence must be uninhibited—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Baldwin: —untrammelled and free from undue influence or pressure of any kind. Until that situation has been clarified I suggest that it is a complete waste of time for this house to refer any matter to any committee.

Mr. Woolliams: Right.

Mr. Baldwin: Some mention has been made of the Hall Commission report. As I said, I have read it almost in its entirety and I have refreshed my memory by reading it through lately. I should like to put one or two aspects of it before the minister now, so that when he comes to close this debate he can, if he sees fit, refer to them. In the first instance I would refer the minister to recommendation 194 on page 88 of the report. I think this recommendation is a very sensible and salutary one. It is as follows:

That taxes collected by the federal government to pay for the expanded health services program be identified in such a manner as to make it clear to the taxpayer that the taxes paid cover the health service benefits made available to him.