

*The Address—Mrs. Rideout*

● (3:50 p.m.)

My introduction to the Commons came at an exciting time in our Parliamentary life. There must be few who have experienced the harsh baptism of political fire so soon after arrival. It was at the same time an historic moment when this country took a decisive step forward in the future of the nation; a time when a strong democratic majority adopted a flag to fly proudly before the world.

The constituency which I am honoured to represent is a very old part of Canada, but one which has a very new outlook on the new Canada which is developing. It is clear from the Westmorland by-election results that a very substantial majority of its constituents believe the Government which I support is competent and equipped to handle their affairs. The fact that the Liberal majority was doubled from the general election surely indicates that the leadership of the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) is thoroughly approved.

It is not my intention, Mr. Speaker, to devote too much time refuting some negative remarks of the Leader of the New Democratic Party, or to comment to any great degree on the subamendment that he has placed before the house. It is logical though, I suppose, that the hon. Gentleman seized upon medicare as the basis for his subamendment, because it is obvious that in the field of social welfare this Government—the Liberal Government—has once again lived up to its reputation as the party that is concerned about the well-being of the people of this nation; the party that introduced and transferred into legislation every significant piece of social welfare legislation at the disposal of the Canadian people.

The Prime Minister made it abundantly clear that this Government does intend to introduce a public medicare program at the earliest possible moment. What is also obvious, Mr. Speaker, is that we have no intention of running roughshod over the Provinces, as was suggested should be done by the Hon. Leader of the N.D.P. in his speech last evening. Indeed, to suggest, as he suggested, that the Government act in this field without first consulting the Provinces, is to deny the undeniable rights the Provinces have in the area of social welfare. To further suggest that certain Provinces are setting up phony medicare programs, without specifically mentioning which Provinces and without substantiating this charge, is a reflection on them at a time when we need to maintain the full confidence and co-operation of the ten great Provinces that make up this nation.

22620—6½

The record of the Liberal Party in the past in the field of social welfare and our willingness as indicated in the Throne Speech to continue our efforts for the increasing security and welfare of our people are proof of the sincerity of our intention to introduce a comprehensive, public medicare program at the first opportunity after full and free consultation with the Provinces.

The constituency of Westmorland, which I have the honour to represent, is one of the few places in our country where the two founding races have lived together from the beginning. We know the value of mutual understanding and harmony. The Acadian French were in the eastern border area of the riding before 1700 and Yorkshire English families settled there as early as 1720. Descendants of both have spread, and remain throughout the constituency, and their numbers are almost equal today.

The whole Province of New Brunswick is an example of the way Canadians can maintain the best traditions of both founding groups while welcoming others of different origins. We have proven that the two distinct original groups can become a single people while keeping their individual cultures, their languages, religious beliefs and political ideals.

We are old historically in my constituency, but one would not know it from the spirit which has marked the province in the last three or four years. Once we in the Maritimes were known as nagging complainers, and there was some justification both for the complaints and the reputation we had. We have still far to go to reach the employment and economic standards of some other areas, but we have found a way to start catching up. Henceforth, by our own efforts ye shall know us. These efforts will include a continued drive to have our special problems recognized, but we shall not sit idly by in frustrated hope.

The present Canadian Government has taken steps long ignored by previous Governments which go a great distance in permitting us to help ourselves. These measures, chief among them the lifegiving financial blood infused into the Atlantic Development Board, recognize that if we have the chance at all we can make our own way and compete with anyone in any place. More has to be done, of course, and I shall come to this again; but I want to emphasize that we are in a generation which got tired waiting for things to come to us; we went out after them, and we are getting them, slowly.