

Medical Care Act

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Joliette on a point of order.

Mr. La Salle: Mr. Speaker, as all hon. members know, custom would have it that on St. John the Baptist Day parliamentarians should not work or assume their responsibilities as parliamentarians. I should like to draw your attention to the fact that, a few minutes ago, in committee of justice and legal affairs a motion moved by a government member proposed that the committee sit on St. John the Baptist day. Recognizing, Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Joliette has brought up a very interesting point of order but, it is permissible, under the Standing Orders of the House, for standing committees to sit whether or not the House is sitting. All matters brought up in standing committees are theirs to decide upon, and not the House.

[*English*]

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. You may recall that just before we took the votes I had risen on a question of procedure. There have been some discussions, and also discussions with members of the committee. I understand that the justice committee is most unlikely to report by Friday; therefore, I am not proceeding with the motion.

Mr. Speaker: The question is now on the main motion, and the Chair recognizes the hon. member for the Northwest Territories (Mr. Firth).

Mr. Wally Firth (Northwest Territories): Mr. Speaker, may I make a few remarks on Bill C-68 when the House has quietened down?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I wonder if the hon. member for Northwest Territories (Mr. Firth) might be given the opportunity to be heard.

Mr. Firth: Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a few remarks on third reading of Bill C-68. I should not like to see the bill pass in its present form; I do not think it will be of advantage to the country. This opinion is shared by many hon. members, especially those who sit on my side of the House. This bill is a retrograde step and will decrease the amount of health and medical service available to people of this country. Bill C-68 has been in the works now for over a year. That, I think, is a pretty good indication that there is something wrong with it. It has been through committee and has been amended slightly, but it is still nowhere near the sort of bill it should be.

Not long ago the hon. member for New Westminster (Mr. Leggatt), seconded by myself, proposed an amendment which if passed would have hoisted the bill for six months. We did not propose our motion because we wanted to be nasty; we did it to give the government an opportunity to look more closely at the bill and, hopefully, to bring it back to the House in a form which would satisfy the majority of hon. members. That, essentially, is why we proposed our amendment. We do not want to see the bill pass in its present form.

[Mr. La Salle.]

The principle of the bill is wrong. We are asking the government to take another hard look at it. The bill will not solve the problems it is alleged to solve. Although members on the front benches opposite have spoken in rambling detail on the bill, they have not convinced us that it is satisfactory. We say that the bill will not solve health problems in this country. I think the general idea behind it would have been more acceptable and it would have received our consent if it had provided for improved, basic health care for all the people of Canada, since health care is extremely important and a basic human right to which all Canadians are entitled.

We as a country are rich enough to provide such health care. The government ought to provide better health care and streamline present facilities so that all who need health care may receive it. I am sure no Canadian would begrudge paying a little extra here and there if this could be done. This bill fails principally because the government has failed to realize that one can divide the problem of the high cost of medical care into two parts. The government has put all its efforts into the cost part but has ignored the part to do with providing high quality medical care and services. In short, Mr. Speaker, the bill shows no leadership. It is a narrow-minded bill which does not take into consideration all those things which make for good health in this country.

We have a system of health care in this country which is based on the idea that if something goes wrong, we should try to fix it. We have built up a system of hospitals, doctors and insurance, all geared to waiting around for something to happen, until something goes wrong. Now that we have established the system, the government is saying to us, "We are going to save money and give you less health care." There is no provision for changing the type of health care available in this country. It is almost as if the government were treating health care as if it were potatoes. First the government decides that it will give everybody potatoes. It begins a program and supplies all the potatoes. Then, when the price of potatoes goes up, the government comes along with Bill C-68 and says, "We cannot afford to give you potatoes at these prices; we will set a limit on how many you are to get next year." Mr. Speaker, health is not like potatoes. You cannot measure it and divide it up. What is more, it does not fit easily into whatever accounting system the department is working on this year. Instead of giving us better health services, instead of showing a little leadership and imagination, the government has presented this bill. I do not like it because, as I said earlier, it gives us fewer potatoes.

We ask the government to look seriously at the bill and to listen to the important proposals and suggestions which have been made in the debate on the bill, especially by members on my side of the House. Over and over again the point has been made in the House that a number of changes can be made to our health care system which would accomplish the government's aim of saving money. They can all be made without reducing the present level of health care. Some of them may even make it better.

● (1700)

I think this bill should be studied further because of the very important and good suggestions made in this House on many occasions, particularly with regard to Bill C-68,