

*Medicare*

National Health and Welfare. This was during a meeting of the committee on health and welfare on July 14. We were discussing private carriers, universal coverage and so on. At that time I posed certain questions which appear at page 549 of the report of that committee. I asked the minister if he was going to stand by certain clauses in the bill the cost of living?

Mr. MacEachen: Well, of course. Here is the bill and you do not expect me to say today that I am going to change the bill that was produced yesterday.

Let me read further from this page:

Mr. Knowles: Now it has three or four months to be kicked around.

Mr. MacEachen: I know.

That was a very short, plaintive and prophetic reply. The minister knew on July 14 that he had been jockeyed out of his determination to proceed with the legislation at that time by the Conservatives and by the Minister of Public Works (Mr. McIlraith) and that something was bound to happen to it. It is no wonder that he has had a sad summer and fall and his sad experience of the last few days. He knew this kind of thing was going to happen, and it has happened in perhaps an even worse way than he anticipated, particularly in the hands of his colleague the Minister of Finance.

I suggest that the Minister of National Health and Welfare should go back over this whole story and realize that the mistakes which have been made can still be corrected by keeping the bill as it is. I do not know what will happen to the amendment moved by the hon. member for Simcoe East (Mr. Rynard), but I imagine it will be ruled out of order. If it is not, we will vote against it, for we do not want the bill postponed any further during the second reading stage. We want this bill to go through and we are prepared to vote for it, but when we vote for it we will be voting for it in its present form. I hope that if the Minister of National Health and Welfare and his colleagues vote for the bill they will be voting for it in its present form.

The minister said today that this is a simple bill with only nine clauses. I do not know whether there is anything in this business about numbers, but if he is going to change the date he will have to amend five clauses. One clause gives the title to the bill so there are really only eight clauses of substance and he will have to amend five of those eight. I suggest there is almost an

[Mr. Knowles.]

element of hypocrisy if the minister votes for this bill on second reading and then has the gall to stand up in the committee of the whole and change five of its eight effective clauses.

Mr. Baldwin: It is a spurious bill.

Mr. Knowles: We now have the full meaning of the word "spurious". We have been given various dictionary definitions but we have now an example of the real thing.

I said I wanted to spell out point by point my contention that this is a sad day in the history of Canada. I am going to identify the three main reasons and then refer to them in greater detail. This is a sad day, first, because we have before us today an open betrayal of the pledged word of the government of this country. Second, this is a sad day because the action of the government in proposing the postponement of medicare for a year is a discrimination against the needs of the people in this country, particularly their medical needs, and I refer particularly to those people who cannot afford the medical care they require. I submit that to treat the people of this country in this way is a shocking denial for which this parliament should not stand.

In the third place, this is a sad day for Canada because this kind of action on the part of the government of the day is a reflection on politics, on parliament and on democracy itself. We over here can stand and say that we are opposed to what is being done, but even those on the opposition side of the house are subject to the criticism of the people in respect of what the minister has done. People are asking if this is what politics is all about and if this is what parliament is doing. We have been promised for years and decades that something would be done. These were solemn promises but apparently they can be thrown out the window when one or two strong men in a cabinet decide there must be a change.

Those are my three main reasons, and I will come back to them, but I suppose there is a fourth point to note. Perhaps it is not so sad but it should be noted. What this whole chapter is doing, along with a few other things, is exploding finally and for all time the myth that the Liberal party is a party of progress. The people of Canada have been fed that line for the last half century or more.

Someone said the other night on television that following the Liberal party convention the party was now stronger and more democratic, but so far as its decisions on policy are