

Medicare

I went along with this. I voted for second reading because I believed in a pension plan, but when I came to serve on the committee, on which the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre also sat, I found that the government had no intention of making any changes in the pension plan bill, and it did not.

The government opposed every amendment that was put forward. It cajoled witnesses who were against the general philosophy that the government was putting forward, and I got the feeling that the assurances that had been given to us were not given with any intention of carrying them out but merely to get the bill past second reading.

This makes a very difficult problem for me and several others who might support second reading of this bill on the general idea that we would be supporting a bill for medical care, but my feeling right now is that unless there are some definite assurances that the government is not only going to consider amendments but will look at them wholeheartedly, we will be making a mistake in supporting the bill on second reading.

The interpretation which the government put on second reading of the pension plan bill was that we had supported every section of the pension plan. Every time in committee that we raised a question about a clause, they said that it contained one of the principles of the bill and we had approved it when we approved second reading.

The government had better let us know what it is going to do in the present case. We know one clause it is going to amend, the one stipulating the commencement date, and to my mind that is a pretty fundamental clause. Today the Minister of Finance (Mr. Sharp) told us that in the committee stage he is going to make some major policy statements. This is not what I understood to be the purpose of committee stage at all. I think that on second reading we should consider the principle and then in committee consider details.

I am not at all satisfied about this yet, Mr. Speaker. From the experience we had with the Canada Pension Plan bill we can see there is something left very much up in the air. In the case of the pension plan bill a lot of people felt very much let down, and felt there was not a wholehearted—

Mr. Munro: Could I ask the hon. member a question?

[Mr. Aiken.]

Mr. Aiken: When I finish my sentence. A lot of people felt that there was not a wholehearted and forthright effort made by the government in that special committee really to come up with a plan that would be acceptable.

Mr. Munro: Would the hon. member accept a question now?

Mr. Aiken: Yes.

Mr. Munro: The hon. member sat on the joint committee on the Canada Pension Plan. Would he not agree there were several fairly significant changes that came out of that committee and were implemented in the legislation?

Mr. Aiken: Mr. Speaker, I cannot remember one important change that was made in that committee. One point I do remember is that one of the hon. members from Vancouver seconded my motion in connection with a change in widows' pensions affecting what are called death-bed marriages, but even with the support of one Liberal member we did not get it through.

Mr. Munro: What about the transition period?

Mr. Aiken: The only things we got through were the amendments proposed by the government and they were not proposed after evidence or after debate. In each case they were introduced at the beginning of a hearing and government members said, "This is what we are going to amend". The hon. member may shake his head, but I never had such a traumatic experience in my nine years in this house. There was nothing which government members would accept.

Mr. Munro: The amendments were worked out by agreement.

• (4:20 p.m.)

Mr. Aiken: The amendments were voted upon and every opposition amendment was voted down; that was the end of it. I think the government can do this because it is their bill, but let us not go into the committee with any false understanding. That was the situation at the time of the committee hearing on the pension plan bill. In this particular case there is no special committee. The minister does not want to hear the arguments twice; once is enough. He is going to hear them in committee of the whole house, and I cannot blame him for not wanting to hear them again in a special committee.