

Canada Health Act

Second, would the Hon. Member foresee a provincial government, since the provinces are getting far less than 50 per cent, passing legislation authorizing the province in question to deduct from taxation going from that province to the federal Government the difference between what the provincial government is getting from the federal Government in medicare and the 50 per cent cost of medicare? Provinces may have to introduce such legislation. Could I have the Hon. Member's comments?

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, since I am from Quebec I am not that familiar with Alberta, but I am familiar with the Quebec system and with the national system. I cannot comment on the Member's allegation that in Alberta the federal Government is only paying 38 per cent or some such figure. I am surprised at that because on a national basis, despite the changes in the funding between the federal Government and the provinces, the federal Government is still paying approximately 50 per cent. In Quebec it is paying more. The system last year cost approximately \$22 billion, and the federal Government was paying around \$11 billion. There are variations with different provinces. I am surprised and doubtful that the variation with respect to Alberta is that great.

By the way, if we include a lot of other costs that are not included in the system that some provinces decide to fund, then the cost of the system—and this includes dentists, in some cases osteopaths and others—would be \$30 billion, with the federal contribution about one-third if you use those figures. But if you use all the moneys included under medicare in the agreement, the federal Government, according to my information, is still paying approximately 50 per cent across the country.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Herbert): If there are no further questions or comments we will move to debate. The Hon. Member for Esquimalt-Saanich (Mr. Munro).

Mr. Donald W. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Mr. Speaker, I was not a member of the committee. We cannot all be members of all committees, but I have been concerned about a number of the matters that have entered into this debate, not the least of which is the further erosion of federal-provincial relations caused by the abrasive methods used by the federal Government throughout this particular piece of legislation.

However, I would like to begin my contribution to the debate, bearing in mind I was not a member of the committee, by stating quite categorically that I have yet to hear of a doctor in Canada refusing his services as a doctor to anyone requiring his services whether the person requesting them could pay or not. This, I think, is the underlying matter that we must not overlook in all of this battle about user fees and so on. Doctors do not refuse services to those who want them. I think we should pay tribute to the fraternity, those to whom we owe so much, that they take their oath as doctors as seriously as they do. The Hippocratic oath means something to a doctor, Mr. Speaker. I sometimes wonder whether the oath of a Privy Councillor is just as meaningful to some Ministers.

The whole object of this exercise seems to be another method of getting conflict going between the federal authorities and the provincial authorities. I hope time will permit me to make a proposal to resolve this matter, not just in this Bill but in other Bills where it is acknowledged, as it is acknowledged in the preamble of this Bill. I do not know whether you have noticed, Mr. Speaker, that this Bill is somewhat unusual in the manner in which it is drafted. It begins with a preambular set of three or four paragraphs. At the very opening of the preamble it says that the Parliament of Canada is called upon to recognize:

—that it is not the intention of the Government of Canada that any of the powers, rights, privileges or authorities vested in Canada or the provinces under the provisions of the Constitution Act, 1867 (formerly named the British North America Act, 1867), or any amendments thereto, or otherwise, be by reason of this Act abrogated or derogated from or in any way impaired;—

That is a noble sentiment. It is not carried out either in this Bill or in the conduct of the Government with relation to the provinces, and that is what I find so deplorable.

To take one example, the Ministers of Health for the provinces, who are charged under the Constitution Act and all of the amendments, met in Halifax a year or so ago. The Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) went to one meeting. She came out after one hour and said that there was no point in the world trying to talk to these Ministers; they were set on a course, a course which the Constitution provides for them to follow. They are set on a course, she said, that makes it impossible to talk to them. When, in the last fortnight, those same Ministers from the provinces met here in this city while this matter was before the House of Commons or the committee, the Minister refused to attend any of the conferences. This is what I find so deplorable about the manner in which this Bill is being pushed forward by this Government.

This is a Bill of confrontation, and that attitude is followed up by something which I find absolutely unacceptable in any federation. I do not know what happened in other provinces. Mark you, I am not arguing in favour of what the legislature of my province is doing, Mr. Speaker. What I deplore is the circulation of an insert in the old age pension cheques of a thing like this. It sends a message out for all those who receive old age pensions in B.C. It is a message which is designed specifically to set the people of British Columbia against the Government of British Columbia on this issue.

• (1230)

That is not the role of the federal Government. Its role surely is to try to meet with the provincial Ministers of Health and resolve the differences which may exist between them in open conference. It should not use this deplorable, abominable device for circulating a message of this sort. I am not talking about the substance of the message. I am talking about the method used. It is beneath contempt that any federal Government should do it. What would happen if any provincial Government were to try to reciprocate and get a message to all Canadians to undermine the federal authority? What would the federal Government do? It would probably incarcerate the