

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

Mr. Forrestall: With their six months' experience!

Mr. Thompson:—to reconsider their position in this respect. They would be well advised to go a little slow in their frivolous approach to this problem, because their party will not always be in government. One day they will be on this side of the house but perhaps even before that they will understand what we are talking about.

Mr. Basford: Even then we will be a more effective opposition than your party.

Mr. Thompson: I regard this debate as fundamental. It has been a privilege to take part in it. I trust that the conscience of members of parliament will begin to work as we approach the final vote which has been forced upon us by the closure action of today, and that hon. members will be very careful to make sure their convictions guide their actions when they vote. Mr. Speaker, may I call it ten o'clock.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

A motion to adjourn the house under Standing Order 40 deemed to have been moved.

COMBINES—DRUGS—PRICE FIXING BY B.C. PHARMACISTS

Mrs. Grace MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, on June 18 I asked the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Basford) whether he could say when a report was expected from the Combines Investigation branch on a matter recently referred to it by the Minister of Welfare of the Province of British Columbia, namely, the legality of the \$1 fee being charged welfare patients for their drug prescriptions by the British Columbia Pharmacists Society.

You suggested, Mr. Speaker, that the question might be placed on the order paper and discussed at the time of adjournment. That was over a month ago and this is my first opportunity to raise the question again. Tonight I ask whether the minister has received a report from the combines branch on the matter and, if so, what does the report say as to the legality of the \$1 fee being charged welfare patients by the pharmacists society for prescriptions?

It is important and urgent to get this matter cleared up. There appears to be a cold

[Mr. Thompson.]

war between the government of British Columbia and the pharmacists society, with the welfare patients in the role of helpless victims. On its side, the pharmacists society claims that the profession has the right to fix the price of its services and that the British Columbia government is not paying enough to meet those charges in respect of patients on welfare.

● (10:00 p.m.)

The society put its case succinctly in an advertisement appearing in the press in early June. The notice, under the caption "Notice to Welfare Recipients", reads:

On April 15th, B.C. pharmacists reluctantly began charging \$1 fee to partially offset their average \$1.14 loss on each welfare prescription dispensed.

Since that time, the B.C. government's social welfare department has done nothing toward a mutually acceptable contract agreement with pharmacists which would cause the removal of this surcharge.

Welfare minister Campbell's referral of this matter to the Combines Investigation Branch has only "side stepped" the issue with no result as yet.

The government has refused to meet with the pharmacists to negotiate an agreement to replace the outdated 1954 payment schedule.

Pharmacists must continue unfortunately to charge the \$1 fee until such time as the government will assume its proper responsibilities and reach an agreement with the pharmacists so that welfare recipients may again conveniently receive necessary medication from the pharmacy of their choice without charge.

The British Columbia Professional
Pharmacists Society.

Evidently this method of trying to get the government of British Columbia to the bargaining table failed to work. On June 26 we find a leading pharmacist quoted in the Vancouver *Sun* as follows:

Pressure which B.C. pharmacists hoped to bring on the provincial government by charging \$1 on prescriptions for social welfare recipients has failed to materialise.

At the annual meeting of Cunningham Drug Stores Wednesday, Ralph Cunningham, chairman of the board, said that when the government had refused to do anything toward meeting the increased costs of the prescriptions, the costs had been passed on to the consumer.

"We had hoped that this would result in an outcry and would force the government to do something" Cunningham said. "But people have been paying the \$1 charge quite happily and there has been little discontent. What's more, there has been at least a 20 per cent drop in usage".

Cunningham said the government has escaped both ways—there has been no pressure and there is less expense.

The wording of this statement is quite significant. In simple English it means that the