

I am trying to do, and the Minister of National Health and Welfare will not be surprised at my trying to do this, is to pin the government down as to when it is going to act on this important measure.

There is not the time to go over the history of the Liberal Party with regard to health insurance or medicare. It dates back to a period before the Minister of National Health and Welfare was born. In fact for 47 years we have been waiting for action on this matter. More particularly in the last few years the Liberal Party, under the present Prime Minister, has been talking very aggressively about medicare. Last July we had four pretty good principles laid down and we were told these would be the underlying principles of the medicare legislation to be introduced by this government. It was, of course, promised categorically in the last election campaign, and it was mentioned in the Speech from the Throne on January 18 of this year.

But in this session, when we have tried to get a clear statement from the Prime Minister or from the Minister of National Health and Welfare as to when this legislation is going to be before us, we have been given a very general kind of answer. We are told it is hoped it will be brought before us at this session. We are told the government's position is still the same as it was in the Speech from the Throne, that it intends to go ahead with the legislation.

I see the Minister of National Health and Welfare is here. He knows that for the government's own sake this is not good enough. This kind of general promise that it will be done if possible, this general statement that we hope to have it done, that is the kind of thing that leads to one session after another going by without action taking place. The minister knows how difficult it was to get him to introduce the labour code. When he did bring it in there were two things omitted, the fair wages and hours of labour amendments and a safety code. He knows how difficult it was to get the government to bring forward the Canada Pension Plan. I submit that what we need from this government, for the sake of the people of Canada, what the government needs to do for its own sake, is to give us a timetable and tell us when it intends to put medicare on the order paper. The government should tell us whether it is its intention that this session shall continue until medicare legislation is enacted. If not, let us all know that it is just so much talk.

23033—100½

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I ask the Minister of National Health and Welfare, when answering for the Prime Minister on this question, not to skirt around it, not to talk about the legal difficulties of fixing a date so many months ahead of July 1, 1967. I ask him to take this house, to take the country, into his confidence and tell us precisely what the government's plans are with respect to medicare. Surely the government itself must have a plan for getting it on the order paper some time in 1966 and for getting it passed by some specific date in 1966.

• (10:10 p.m.)

We hear a great deal from the government house leader about the desirability of planning the session and timetabling our work. The time to plan things and to timetable our work is not when we get into some crisis. The time to do it is in advance.

Therefore, I give the Minister of National Health and Welfare tonight a golden opportunity. I hope he will seize it and will tell us when medicare will be put on the order paper, and by what date the government feels it must be passed in order that the promise to have it in effect by July 1, 1967, can be implemented without fail.

Hon. A. J. MacEachen (Minister of National Health and Welfare): First of all, Mr. Speaker, I should like to explain to the house and to the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre that the Prime Minister wishes to express his regret concerning his absence this evening. He had indicated earlier in the day that he would like to be here, but it is now impossible for him to be here to reply to the question directed to him by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre.

The hon. member asks the specific question, when it is expected the legislation on medicare from the federal point of view will be placed on the order paper. Naturally it would be impossible for me to make a clear declaration on that point this evening. Nor do I think it is a crucial question because it is the firm intention of the government to adhere to the four principles laid down by the Prime Minister last July at the federal-provincial conference.

The communiqué issued after the recent conference of federal-provincial ministers of health includes the following two paragraphs:

In discussing medical care insurance, several provinces accepted the federal proposals and indicated their readiness to commence programs by July 1, 1967. Certain provinces, however, were unprepared to make definite commitments at this time.