

*Proceedings on Adjournment Motion*

the federal government was concerned medicare was here to stay. In his reply the Prime Minister, after a few introductory words, said to me that the law was such that at the end of five years there would be a straight transfer of tax room. I believe I am quoting him verbatim.

This concerned me for reasons that I may have time to give in a moment, and so I put a supplementary question to him in which I asked that he give the assurance that the federal government would not get out of medicare at the end of the five year period on a unilateral basis—that it would not do so without consulting the provinces.

To my astonishment the Prime Minister's reply was that I should study the act, that I should know what was in it, and that I should realize—and I shall quote him directly—that the law says in five years we will get out of it. As hon. members are aware, I posted this question for the earliest possible late show and I am glad that that opportunity has come tonight because that is not my reading of the law and, with all respect to the Prime Minister, I think his reading is incorrect.

The section in question is section 8 of the Medical Care Act. I was very much involved in every stage of that legislation. Indeed *Hansard* records that I took part in the discussion on section 8, which provides that at roughly the end of a five year period.

—the Government of Canada shall review the provisions of this act respecting the amount and manner of payment of the contributions payable by Canada pursuant to section 3 with a view to formulating proposals for any changes therein that appear then to be necessary or desirable—

There is more to the section. It is a long one but I have read the heart of it. The heart of it is that at the end of five years, or six months before the end of five years, there shall be a review with a view to formulating proposals for change, if they then seem necessary or desirable. But the Prime Minister said this afternoon that the hon. member should realize that the law says in five years we will get out of it.

There is an alarming difference between a provision in the law which says there shall be a review and proposals made, and the view stated this afternoon that it is automatic, that it is in the law, that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) was simply operating within the law when he made his recent comments on this matter. I know that, when it comes to the interpretation of the law, courts pay no attention to what is in *Hansard*; but hon. members of this house will be interested to note that

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

when section 8 of the act was under debate in the house on December 6, 1966, it was spoken to not by the then minister of health but by the then minister of finance, the present Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp). He referred to some questions I had put to him and admitted my contention that this section was not legislative in effect, that it was merely the statement of an intention. However, he went on to make it clear that the government wanted it in the act, that it was the government's intention at the end of the five years—let me quote him exactly—to—

—put forward proposals to the provinces for a change in the method of compensation—

• (10:20 p.m.)

I submit, Mr. Speaker, that a commitment to put forward proposals to the provinces implies consultation; it implies bringing the matter before parliament; it implies consideration. But this afternoon the Prime Minister did not say that. He simply said that the hon. member should realize that the law says in five years we will get out of it.

I was concerned about section 8 when it was before the house, and it does not say that. On December 6, 1966, I asked the then minister of finance certain questions in an effort to find out from him what would happen in five years time. I draw attention to these words of the then minister of finance:

This clause is intended to require the government—

I admit the strength of the word "require"; but what was required?

—five years from now to make such a review and to make proposals.

Please note that two or three minutes earlier he had said, "proposals to the provinces". Now listen to this from the then finance minister:

But it does not in any way, as far as I understand the intent of the bill, place any limitation upon the scope of the act or upon the longevity of the payments themselves.

I suggest that the Liberal members of this house were as astounded as I was to learn this afternoon the Prime Minister's interpretation of the medicare legislation is that it was guaranteed for only five years. I am not fighting with the government about this legislation. I fought too hard to get it. The country spent nearly 50 years trying to get it. We thought we got it as a permanent piece of legislation in this country. I suggest it is very alarming to hear now that at the end of five years the federal government is to get out.