

Medical Care Act

should be more responsible for promoting their own personal health. Good health in itself is not the end; it is just the beginning, the prerequisite to high quality of life. Therefore, it is not enough for the government to say to Canadians, "We shall arbitrarily cut back spending on health costs and research. The onus will now be on you to become more physically fit, that is, get more exercise, stop smoking and reduce your intake of alcohol, and so on."

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Symes: What is the minister doing about it?

Mr. Blackburn: My colleague from Sault Ste. Marie (Mr. Symes) asks, what the minister is doing about it. What can the government do? Can it legislate against smoking and against the consumption of alcohol? Perhaps it can, but I do not think that is the right or practical way to go. Why not end tax concessions given to those powerful, wealthy industries which produce cigarettes in particular and alcoholic beverages.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Hear, hear!

Mr. Blackburn: The hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands, who spent a considerable portion of his political life arguing for health insurance, has always maintained, correctly, that there are two phases to health insurance. The first, which for the most part has been achieved, is to remove the financial barrier between individuals providing health care and those receiving health care. The second phase is that we had to begin changing the health delivery system. In other words, if we want to reduce the cost of health insurance we will have to replace some of the high-cost services with lower-cost services. Again, it needs to be stressed that for the initial period this would necessitate an outlay of money, but in the long run savings would be realized.

It is my sincere hope, Mr. Speaker, that this bill will not be passed. There is every indication that members on the government side will see fit to give the bill final approval. In doing this, the government may satisfy the wishes of those who have declared that this government should curtail its expenditures. Nevertheless, if it does pass it will surely be to the detriment of all Canadians who require, and indeed deserve, the best possible health care system which can be provided.

I return to what the minister said and what others have repeated during this third reading debate. Canadians enjoy one of the best health care systems in the world. Why does the minister—who is not in his seat this afternoon—want to change it? If he boasts—accurately, I think—that we have had for several years one of the best health care systems in the world, what is the point of reducing its efficiency or of lessening its ability to deliver health care in a general sense? I quite agree about the need to trim some fat. But why must we jeopardize the established system of federal-provincial cost-sharing originally set up with the interest of the health of this country's people in mind?

Perhaps Liberal Senator David Croll best summed up my thoughts on this bill when he said:

It is wrong in concept, it is divisive in practice, and in my opinion it is wrong, wrong, wrong, a thousand times wrong.

[Mr. Blackburn.]

Mr. J. P. Nowlan (Annapolis Valley): Mr. Speaker, I am glad of this opportunity to participate in the closing hours, hopefully, of the debate on Bill C-68, not having participated previously in the debate at second reading stage of this fundamental bill. Many of my concerns have been ably expressed, particularly by members on the opposition side. Some concerns have been expressed by members on the government side. I wonder, on this Friday afternoon, what William Lyon Mackenzie King, looking down on us from up above, would think of Bill C-68 which represents a retreat from the flagship of the Liberal party's social program which he introduced in part.

This bill will put fundamental restrictions on something Canadians from coast to coast need, namely, medicare. The program was begun a decade ago, when I was a neophyte member of this House, under the then leader of the Liberal party, Lester Pearson. The government had proposed a formula which would interest—that is the conservative word, although "seduce" might be more appropriate—the ten provinces in joining the proposed medicare program, a program which was to be greatly to the benefit of the Canadian people. Little provinces like P.E.I. and Nova Scotia, other provinces like Ontario, and richer provinces like Alberta chose to join the program. British Columbia is in its own district category.

There were four conditions for joining. The government said to the provinces, "You do not have to participate in the program; we do not intend to trespass on your jurisdiction. However, if you abide by four conditions, we shall give you federal money with which to set up a bona fide medicare program." That program was designed to help all Canadians, particularly those who did not have money to obtain proper medical services. The formula was fair and provided for a 50-50 system of cost-sharing as between the government and participating provinces. Succumbing either to suggestion or political seduction, all ten provinces, over time, joined the program. As the hon. member for Athabasca (Mr. Yewchuk), other members of my party and the hon. member for Brant (Mr. Blackburn) speaking on behalf of the NDP, said, we have set up in this country a pretty respectable, responsible plan of medicare for all Canadian citizens.

Then something happened. Out of the blue, unilaterally, the federal government made an announcement. It decided that the ground rules would no longer provide for a 50-50 cost-sharing as between federal and provincial governments. Participation would be on the basis of provincial expenditures. We know costs have been rising. The government, in the name of responsibility in spending, wanted to control the escalation in medicare spending. That was a laudable objective, but the government's action would have been more laudable and better received if it had come about after consultation and negotiation with the provinces concerned.

Such a process would have been preferable to the unilateral statement which announced what the government intended to do. In so many words, the government said to the provinces, "You had better come along with us, boys. Now we have a majority in the House of Commons and if we want to we can change the ground rules." Perhaps that is oversimplifying the matter. All the same, this is a subject of extreme concern to all Canadians from coast to