

Medicare

number of hospital beds, will be a memorial to be proud of. In that province, the C.C.F. government of the day, the forerunner of the N.D.P., had the courage under the leadership of Premier T. C. Douglas to institute a system of medicare identical with the one proposed in the Hall report. The scheme is based on the principles of that report. There was no promising, promising, promising. It was promised before the election and it was instituted immediately afterwards. There was none of this talk about building flexibility; there was action to fulfil a promise.

That government had to fight against all the pressure groups concerned, because they knew it was the first pilot plan in the country. That government had to lose its life in the process because it was the fight over medicare which in a large measure enabled the marshalling of all the forces opposed to it. But that government which lost its life in the process brought new hope and new help to the people of Saskatchewan in doing so.

If there be any in this house who still think that medicare in Saskatchewan is an evil thing or that it is likely to be displaced in the near future, I should like them to tell me how it is that the premier of Saskatchewan, Mr. Ross Thatcher, a sworn foe of public medicare for a long while, has not dared to repeal the legislation.

• (2:20 p.m.)

Hon. members to my right have talked about all the difficulties and trials of the national health scheme in Britain. Undoubtedly there have been difficulties—trials and difficulties of all kinds. I would like to ask how it is that several Conservative governments have been in power in Great Britain since the time medicare was instituted there and yet they did not repeal this "terrible" piece of legislation? The answer in both cases is the same. Neither in Saskatchewan nor in Britain would a Liberal or a Conservative government dare to repeal medicare because the people, having once tasted of medicare, would have no more of this housebroken variation that is being trotted out before elections by our Liberal friends and carefully tucked into mothballs afterwards, ready for the next election campaign.

How is medicare getting on in Saskatchewan? To answer that I quote briefly from a

dispatch of the Co-operative Press Association issued in September, 1966. The facts in it can be easily checked. It reads:

Opponents of medicare, who prophesied that the costs of a comprehensive plan, like the one set up by the former C.C.F. government in Saskatchewan, would steadily mount, are being confounded by the facts. The costs of the medicare plan in Saskatchewan are now actually going down.

The Liberal government of the province, upon taking office, raised the premiums without waiting to find out from experience if it was necessary, but they have found no reason for any further increase and have announced that the premium rate for 1967 will be the same as for 1966.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, other things will go up, the things that are run by private business, but medicare premiums in Saskatchewan will be same in 1967 as they are in 1966.

When the C.C.F. government first set up the plan the rates for combined hospital and medical insurance were \$72 for families and \$36 for single people. After the plan was well launched the C.C.F. reduced the premiums to \$52 for families and \$26 for single people. When the Liberals took office in 1964 they almost immediately raised the rates again to their original level. Now they are making money on the plan and may have to face a public outcry for a return to the lower level set by the C.C.F.

These are the facts when one gets done with all the windowdressing, electioneering and all the other things that go along with a lack of will to institute medicare.

We hear much about the terrific fight which the Canadian Medical Association put up against the institution of medicare in Saskatchewan. Members of that association did, but even for them the proof of the pudding is in the eating. The strongest indication that the plan was being successful in every way came at the time of a meeting of the general council of the Canadian Medical Association in Edmonton this summer. At that time Dr. E. W. Barootes of Regina, who had been one of the most vigorous leaders of the opposition to medicare, told his colleagues that some of his profession's fears about medicare had proved unfounded.

Dr. Barootes made a courageous admission when he said:

Some of the qualms we have had have been disproved and some of us should revise our thinking.

The idea that total medical care results in constantly mounting costs has been shattered.

Then he went on to say that the fact is that the total cost of Saskatchewan medicare dropped last year by \$500,000 from \$23 million to \$22½ million.

He said in an interview later he could not explain why medicare costs have not shot up as he and other doctors had predicted. He said it may be