

*Medicare*

acceptable to the majority of the people; I should not say to everybody because there are always people who feel that any plan is improperly administered. I merely say that I think the Ontario plan is a suitable one, that it is working well, and that in my view the federal government could easily support it as of July 1, 1967.

In the same way, the government could support a number of the other plans, paying the premiums of the needy and of those living on low incomes. It could do this without swamping the economy as the present plan appears likely to do on the admission of the government itself. I am offering an alternative which would work, though I recognize that the hon. member and myself have different philosophies on this question. I do not hesitate to say that I prefer that those who can afford to pay their own premiums should not pay them under the government plan but should pay them somewhere else.

• (4:10 p.m.)

**Mr. Knowles:** Will the hon. member permit one more question? He and I have different philosophies, but I want to get to the bottom of this. How does he reconcile his statement that he does not like a means test with his support of the proposition that a person has to declare his poverty in order to get free medicare?

**Mr. Aiken:** He merely declares his income. If he has an income that is not taxable then that fact is declared and accepted.

**Mr. Knowles:** That is poverty.

**Mr. Aiken:** I do not think it is a case of poverty at all. In fact, I suspect there are a lot of people who do not pay income tax who should not get an exemption, but this is erring on the wrong side. They may well be liable to income tax but do not declare their income. Nevertheless, the principle is that what they declare for tax purposes qualifies them.

I do not particularly object to this system. I have seen it work. If I had not seen it work I would be talking about something I did not know anything about. As I say, I have seen it work and nobody has ever complained to me about somebody from the government coming around and asking how much they use to support a wife and children, what further income is earned and so on. It is not that sort of plan.

My theory is that if the people of Saskatchewan want the kind of plan that the hon. member suggests, a universal plan, then all right, the federal government should support it. I do not say that the federal government should not support it, because that plan is providing for the needy and for low income people. If Saskatchewan wants that sort of plan, if the provincial legislature has passed it and the people have accepted it, then fine, the federal government should support it.

Likewise, if the people of Ontario are satisfied with the plan which that province's government has come up with, then the federal government should support it. Further, if the people of Alberta and British Columbia are satisfied with the plans their provinces have promulgated, then the federal government should say; "All right, that is your plan and we will support it." My contention is that the federal government should not come along and say, "We don't care what you want in the provinces. This is what we consider is a proper plan and we will give you money only for it."

My objection is based on constitutional grounds. The federal government is walking in over the top of the provinces and telling them: "This is your jurisdiction. We know we have no business in this but we won't give you any money unless you meet our standards." I am not going to argue against a universal plan if that is what is wanted and brought into effect in any province, but it is not the business of the federal government.

I have spent a little more time on this particular subject than I intended, Mr. Speaker, and I wish to mention another matter before I sit down. Sooner or later, unless the amendment is carried, we are going to have to vote on second reading of the bill. I must admit that my approach to voting on second reading has changed drastically since my experience with the Canada Pension Plan bill. At that time the house and the public were assured by letters from the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) which I asked to have tabled and which were tabled—there were about a dozen of them—that once the Canada Pension Plan was passed in principle the government would be happy to hear all sorts of people make representations and to alter the plan to suit whatever the special joint committee recommended. It was a very magnanimous offer: "Give us second reading and you can do anything you like with the plan afterwards."