

Medicare

I am going to start with this editorial from the *Toronto Star* of May 18, 1966, headlined "National medicare—proud Liberal achievement":

The Liberal government's conclusive commitment to introduce a national medicare program on July 1, 1967—whether all the provinces sign or not—redeems a pledge that has been gathering dust for the past 47 years.

With all the delays, frustrations, and obstruction the scheme has faced since it was first endorsed in principle by the Liberal party in 1919, Prime Minister Pearson can none the less take pride that it is a government under his leadership that will finally bring the program into being.

Well, hon. members, that commitment seems to have been more flexible—to use one of the Prime Minister's favourite words—than conclusive and is, I fear, slated to gather more layers of dust in its own hallowed spot on the shelf of Liberal party dreams. It may be that a Messiah other than the Prime Minister referred to will eventually redeem it.

Writing in the *Ottawa Citizen* on May 18 last under the headline "Medicare Start by July, 1967", Don MacGillivray said:

The big decision, expected to get wavering provinces on the medicare bandwagon by that date, was announced yesterday in the Commons by Health Minister Allan MacEachen.

Mr. MacEachen said the federal government will be ready to pay medicare contributions to any province with a plan in effect on the target date, even though not all provinces join.

We all know now, of course, that it was not the provinces who were wavering. A Canadian Press report in the *Ottawa Journal* of June 8 stated:

Health Minister MacEachen said Tuesday six provinces have given positive indications they intend to take up the federal offer to pay half the cost of medical care insurance starting July 1, 1967.

Not surprisingly, the four wealthiest provinces, Ontario, Quebec, Alberta and British Columbia represent the negative side in this instance. On August 3, a Canadian Press report in the *Ottawa Journal* attributed to the Prime Minister the statement that he foresaw no changes in federal legislation as a result of criticism levelled by provincial premiers during that week. As late as Thursday, the first day of September, hon. members in the House of Commons were assured by the Prime Minister, replying to a question put by one of my colleagues, that medicare legisla-

[Mr. Howe (Hamilton South).]

tion did have priority for this session. And that, hon. members, is a factual record of the medicare promises made by the Liberal party during this last few months of the 47 years since the pledge was first introduced.

Surely, in a period of 47 years, there must have been some honest, sincere Liberals who really felt that the Canadian people needed this care. Surely, these have not all been election promises with no sincerity behind them. Has there not been, in all this time, one Liberal Prime Minister with the guts to face the private insurance companies, the medical profession and the corporate elite, and give to the people of Canada a social benefit that is truly needed.

Never before in history, perhaps, has a political party laboured so long to give birth to an important piece of legislation and still managed to avoid the final commitment. We are still dealing with empty promises, promises that were so beguilingly voiced in the last election campaign and, as I have just demonstrated, so faithfully repeated right up to the recent day of betrayal.

It has been suggested in some quarters that the Minister of Finance was forced into scuttling the program as a "dramatic" gesture in order to halt inflation and hold back pressures in other sectors of the economy. In other words, the medicare program which was designed primarily to assist those who lacked opportunities for first-rate medical care was to be laid as a propitiatory offering at the feet of Bay street financiers, insurance companies and, regrettably, too large a group of medical men whose great ethical tradition has been to some degree diminished by self-motivation. As recently as this afternoon I came across a page in the *Monetary Times* of October, 1966. I do not know who the author of this article is, but it is a Parliament Hill report by the Ottawa bureau entitled "Behind the Mockery". In part it states:

• (9:30 p.m.)

Most of the cost of medicare would be a simple transfer payment; money which Canadians now pay to private insurance schemes or directly to their doctors would be channelled instead through public agencies. The additional cost of medicare would be around \$100 million at the most in the first year—