

## Medicare

was the right thing to do at that time. When the government removed the joker from the whole hospitalization legislation in 1958 it did the right thing. It brought in the legislation and it was up to the provinces to decide whether or not they wished to avail themselves of it. As a result, all the provinces later found it in the public interest to do so.

I suggest that the case is similar in respect of a medical care plan. The government proceeds with the legislation and leaves it up to the provinces to decide whether or not they wish to avail themselves of the contributions. The sooner this is done, the sooner we will have a medical care program in this country. Who would want to say it would be undesirable to bring in a medical care program with universal coverage? Who would want to say this is not a desirable goal? Even a newspaper such as the *Toronto Globe and Mail* says quite emphatically that it should remain a goal of Canada to implement a medicare program with universal coverage. It procrastinates a little concerning what the proper timing should be, but it states this as a goal at which the country should aim. We agree. I am not too sure whether most members agree but certainly a large number agree that we should proceed in this direction as quickly as possible.

We find fault with the government for retreating on the matter of timing. It appears to me that it is also retreating somewhat on one or two of the basic principles formerly enunciated.

If debate is supposed to help to clear up points of misunderstanding and confusion, which I believe is the case, then I should like to make reference to the speech made the other day by the hon. member for Digby-Annapolis-Kings (Mr. Nowlan). I am sorry the hon. member is not here at the moment. In addition to other things he mentioned in the course of his remarks, he seemed to find some fault with the present government for not following, in the case of medicare, the course of action which was followed in respect of the hospitalization plan in 1956-57. I find this rather difficult to understand. This is a rather strange point of view for the hon. member to put forward in view of the fact that it was precisely the kind of provision which the St. Laurent Liberal government had in its hospitalization plan that effectively prevented the hospital program from becoming universal in this country.

• (4:10 p.m.)

Why a member of the Conservative party should want the present Liberal government to go back to its old pre-1958 days is very difficult for me to understand. So it cannot be said that there is any equivocation on our part as to where we stand on this legislation, let me reiterate that we completely support the main recommendations on the Hall Commission report and the legislation now before us. We think that in certain respects it may not go far enough, that is to say, it does not provide for implementation soon enough. There is this undesirable delay which is the result of a decision by a cabal in the cabinet and not by the cabinet itself.

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** It is always the decision of the whole cabinet. Surely there are no cabals in this cabinet.

**Mr. Schreyer:** If the right hon. Leader of the Opposition tells me that all decisions are made by the cabinet I must take advantage of his experience and accept that statement, but I think that right hon. gentleman is jesting or saying that in a bantering manner. Certainly it seems almost public knowledge now that the decision to delay was made by a cabal within the cabinet.

I should like to conclude, because I believe the time allotted to me has almost expired, by saying that we certainly realize governments must always proceed pragmatically and by compromise, and sometimes even with equivocation, but I think this government has demonstrated too often in the past few months that it equivocates too often, compromises on principle too often and is so pragmatic as to lose sight of principles. It has made firm commitments and then broken them. It has stated categorically four principles of a medicare program and the date of implementation; yet now it is retreating on all fronts. This leads me to repeat what was said by a premier of one of the prairie provinces a few months ago, namely, that the assurances of this government appear to be worthless. He was referring to the manoeuvring of the government in respect of the decision to transfer the overhaul base from Winnipeg to Montreal. That statement certainly applies to the government's assurances in respect of the medical care plan.

I do not think it really requires any amount of persuasive debate or effort to convince most hon. members that the time is really here and the economy of the country is such as to support a public medicare plan. An