

Medicare

Mr. Douglas: I thank the house, Mr. Speaker, and I shall try not to impose on hon. members for too long. The fact is that the cost of medicare is not a new cost. It is simply a transfer of payments. It means that whereas the \$600 million which people now pay for medical services falls upon those who are unfortunate enough to be ill, under medicare the burden will be borne by all the people of Canada out of taxes levied on the basis of ability to pay. This is not inflation. This is, on the contrary, a redistribution of income so that those with large incomes can contribute to a plan to help provide medical care for people who cannot afford it, and who will be able to use what they would otherwise spend on medical bills to provide themselves with some of the necessities of life.

I think Mr. Eric Kierans, the minister of health in the former Quebec government and a reputed economist, put it very well when he said the other day to a group of students in Montreal:

You do not reduce the inflation of today by delaying the spending of money a year from now.

Every economist in this country knows perfectly well that a plan which will not cost this country a single dollar in 1966, and will cost us nothing in the first half of 1967, could not possibly be inflationary. However, if the Minister of Finance has done nothing else he has introduced a new theory of contra-cyclical financing. Ever since the days of John Maynard Keynes governments have talked in terms of contra-cyclical financing by building up a shelf of public works which they can bring into effect whenever there is a period of deflation, and gradually taper off during a period of inflation. This has had some measure of success. Now the Minister of Finance (Mr. Sharp) is going to introduce a social welfare shelf. This will be a new technique, as suggested by Professor Melville H. Watkins, in a recent issue of the *Canadian Forum*. We can expect now that whenever we face a period of inflation, the Minister of Finance will rise and say: We are going to cancel family allowances. If the inflation gets worse, he will say: We are now going to do away with veterans pensions. Finally, if things get very bad, he will say: We are going to stop paying the senators.

• (4:40 p.m.)

I presume that during a period of deflation and unemployment, the Minister of Finance will rise and say: In view of the fact we have unemployment and we have a deflationary

[The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rinfret).]

situation, I want to promise the house we will bring in medicare on Canada's second centennial celebration; or five years from now, we propose to introduce university bursaries. Surely, Mr. Speaker, one has only to state this matter to realize how ridiculous it is.

The minister said when introducing the bill that the delay was based on the government's assessment of economic conditions in the country. What economic conditions in the country? The government has been boasting that conditions were never better in the country. The government has been boasting of the high gross national product, the highest employment, the greatest rate of economic expansion. If we cannot afford medicare in this period of prosperity and affluence, when can we afford it? It is very clear, Mr. Speaker, that Liberal policy is this, that during periods of recession the treasury cannot afford medicare, and during periods of prosperity the economy cannot afford medicare. We are not satisfied, and I do not believe the Canadian people are satisfied, with this kind of humbug.

I want to tell the government that when this bill gets into committee of the whole, we will resist any attempt to change the date. We will want some better and more adequate explanation than anything we have received so far. We will support this bill, but we will fight with all the powers at our command to see that medicare comes into effect, as the government promised, on Canada's 100th birthday. We are supporting this legislation because we agree with the Hall Commission that it constitutes a health charter for Canadians; that it will give to our people freedom from fear and freedom from want; that it provides health services irrespective of race, colour, creed or financial circumstances; and that it will enhance human dignity and extend social security in this country.

[Translation]

Hon. Martial Asselin (Charlevoix): Mr. Speaker, I feel that the French speaking members from Quebec should take part in such an important debate, and I regret that until now so few government members from Quebec have taken the opportunity to do so.

Before getting into the mainstream of my speech, I should like to say to the hon. member who has just taken his seat, the leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Douglas), that he has wrongfully imputed to the Conservative party intentions when he claimed that the object of the amendment proposed by our party is to postpone the implementation of medicare.