

Medicare

Mr. MacEachen:—have apparently overlooked the importance of the step being taken in this bill. They have in their discussions apparently overlooked the experience of the provinces. The hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam talked about the experience in the province of Saskatchewan. This is the only province in Canada in which there is in effect a comprehensive medical insurance program. Members of the New Democratic Party, notably the hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam, the hon. member for Hamilton South and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, have urged very broad coverage under this bill. I think it would have been instructive for them to look at the range of coverage in the province of Saskatchewan where experience does exist. Chiropractors, whose inclusion has been urged upon us, are not covered in the Saskatchewan plan. Neither are optometrists nor physiotherapists.

An hon. Member: Yes, they are.

Mr. MacEachen: Not under the medical care insurance act. They were covered at one point and the coverage was discontinued.

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Chairman, may I ask the minister a question? I have in my hand a copy of the act. May I ask the minister when physiotherapy was discontinued, because it is written right in the act which I have in my hand?

• (9:30 p.m.)

Mr. MacEachen: In what year?

Mr. Lewis: In 1961-1962.

Mr. Brand: Can I straighten out the problem for hon. members?

Mr. MacEachen: I understand that the hon. member for York South has the original act which did cover physiotherapy. It has now been discontinued under medical insurance and I believe it may be covered under hospital insurance. But hon. members should remember that nursing is not covered.

Mr. Lewis: May I ask the minister a question? When was this change made? I am ignorant of the date.

Mr. MacEachen: I do not know either but I will find out. In the province of Saskatchewan, which has been held out as a model—and I have no complaints about that—the only service in addition to medical care which is covered at present is dental care. The whole range of health professions which has been urged upon the house is not covered under the Saskatchewan plan.

An hon. Member: Neither is general care.

Mr. MacEachen: I think the experience in Saskatchewan illustrates the magnitude of this step. I believe it would be very unwise to begin with total comprehensive coverage of all the professions at the present time.

An hon. Member: Why not?

Mr. MacEachen: We have had the recent experience of the development of OMSIP in the province of Ontario. This is a publicly administered plan. For example, eye refractions are not covered, nor are optometrists and physiotherapists.

Mr. Winkler: What about workmen's compensation?

Mr. MacEachen: Under that plan nursing, osteopaths, podiatrists and chiropractors are not covered. This is a publicly administered plan in the province of Ontario. We are attempting to relate the provisions of our medical care insurance to the plans in existence in the provinces and while undoubtedly there is some variation among the provinces in the administration of their plans we are proceeding along the lines of the publicly administered plans in the provinces with respect to the inclusion of benefits.

A great deal has been said about the inclusion of optometrists in this plan. We have not proposed in the plan to cover optometrists and I would suggest that if it were possible to enlarge the sphere of coverage in addition to the medical profession hon. members would have to ask themselves what is the next order of priority. We would have to ask ourselves whether the next profession to be covered under the plan should be that of the optometrists or the podiatrists, as the hon. member for Moose Jaw has suggested, or should it be chiropractors, as the leader of the Social Credit party suggested? We have stated that first priority should be accorded to the services rendered by medical practitioners, namely, physicians, general practitioners and specialists.

If we were to go beyond that, what would be the next order of priority? Would hon. members say that the professions which have been mentioned are more important to the health of the Canadian people than, for example, the coverage of drugs? Would coverage of prescribed drugs be more or less important than any of the proposals which have been made in the house? I think we all agree that each of the items which I have mentioned and which have been mentioned in the house is