

Medicare

very learned decision reached by my colleague the hon. Deputy Speaker in his capacity as Chairman. I leave it now with the Minister of National Health and Welfare to find some way to perhaps satisfy the requests and suggestions made by hon. members of the opposition.

The house will now resume discussion in committee of the whole.

And the house having resumed in committee.

On subclause (f)—“*medical practitioner*”

• (5:40 p.m.)

The Chairman: May I ask if there is any further discussion on the subject of paragraph (f)?

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Chairman, I should like to ask the Minister of National Health and Welfare one question. Will he pay heed to the suggestion contained in the last sentence or two of the ruling from Mr. Speaker, namely that the minister should try to find some way of satisfying the members of this house on this very important point of enlarging the services covered by this bill?

Mr. Baldwin: That was the *obiter dictum*.

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Chairman, I want to thank His Honour for giving me the opportunity of trying to satisfy the members of the opposition. I will certainly pay heed to his admonition which is now supported by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. This will be a big job, but I will see what I can do about it.

Mr. Knowles: When?

Mr. Fulton: Mr. Chairman, the one point I want to make relates to the absurdity to which the minister appears to have been driven, not appears to have been, but is in fact driven, in respect of this whole position here as illustrated by what he told us last night regarding his intention relating to optometric services. Last night the minister said, and I am reading from the first column of page 10540 of *Hansard*:

It is not my intention to include the optometric profession under the plan and I believe I would be on very dangerous ground with the provinces because no province has included in its public plan eye refractions, although in Alberta optometrists are included under an extended benefit plan.

Later he said:

It is an important and numerous profession in Canada and I would like to meet their representations by making an amendment so as to avoid at least any element of discrimination which might exist within the bill.

In the second column on the same page he is reported as having said regarding his intention:

It seems to me there is a situation there which I should like to correct by giving the provinces an opportunity to remove eye refractions from insured services so that a parity of treatment would exist between ophthalmologists and optometrists and the patients of each. This may be described as removing something from the plan—

It certainly not only may but should be described as removing something from the plan. The minister said:

—but it does maintain equality of treatment between both professions and the patients. This is not the most desirable move from the point of view of the optometric profession, but I have had letters from members of the profession saying that this would be an acceptable solution for them.

What do we find? We find the minister by his stubborn refusal to include related medical services or services within the field of the healing arts, is driven to an absurdity in proposing to remove from insured services what is in effect a medical service. He recognizes, in other words, that he is forcing upon some of the professions what they call professional genocide because he will not include them under a scheme to which the federal government will contribute. He then says we are going to relieve them from that sentence of death by taking part of the medical services, which are in effect rendered, out of this bill. Can the minister, in all honesty sit there and say he is going to commit himself to such an absurd course? I hope he will not and will reconsider the situation. I appreciate his desire to be fair to optometrists, but will he not agree with me that this really is an absurdity?

I understand the diagnosis, prescription and treatment of refractions, if performed by an ophthalmologist to be a medical service even within the minister's narrow definition. The point seems to be that these same services are performed by optometrists who do not fall within the minister's narrow definition and who will therefore be prejudiced as a result of this bill if it goes through in its present form. The minister says he is going to remove that prejudice by disallowing a service, legitimate for contributions, which is in fact a medical service. To do that would be to make a mockery of a so-called medical care insurance scheme.

Mr. MacEachen: I do not want to carry on a debate with my hon. friend, but I should like to make sure he understands what I have in mind. It is not my proposal to disallow a