

Medicare

● (9:10 p.m.)

Mr. MacEachen: I agree with my hon. friend that this is an important matter. It has been the subject of discussions between the members of the Canadian Medical Association and myself on several occasions. What has been requested by the Canadian Medical Association is that no provision of this bill prohibit the possibility of provincial arrangements which would permit a physician to elect to practise outside any plan, and that there be nothing in this bill to prohibit, for example, an insurable resident of any province from paying a physician directly or having the services rendered by a physician payable to the patient or the insurable resident. I can give my hon. friend the assurance that these two types of arrangements are possible under this bill, but this is a matter for decision and determination on the part of the provincial authority on the one hand and the provincial medical associations on the other. I am quite confident in saying at this point that the discussions between myself and members of the Canadian Medical Association were concluded in a mood of agreement.

Mr. Brand: I thank the minister for his assurances, but I wish I were as optimistic as he. I cannot understand, if you insure the services of a physician so that every act he does in his professional capacity is an act of the government of Canada, how he can practise outside this plan. I cannot understand that any more than I can understand how I, if I were inducted into the armed forces of this country by an act of parliament, could say that I would not serve. I heard the minister say that such a refusal would be good enough and that I could do that, but does the minister think I could get away with it?

At the moment I quite frankly do not care what the medical association wanted. I am concerned about clause 2(d). It has been said that what is being done is to insure people against the cost of illness, but what in fact has been done is not only to insure people against the cost of illness but to insure the services provided by doctors. That is the key point.

Mr. MacEachen: There are doctor-sponsored plans in existence in various provinces and certainly physicians opt out of those particular plans and practise outside of them.

Mr. Brand: Those plans were not adopted as a result of legislation.

[Mr. Brand.]

Mr. MacEachen: This parliament cannot determine the arrangements that provincial legislators will establish, but there is nothing in this legislation which will prevent provincial legislators from doing exactly what the hon. gentleman proposes. This legislation gives the provinces full freedom. This is all we can do and to do otherwise would be to impose upon the provinces certain arrangements which I think would not be acceptable. The provinces are quite free under this measure to work out arrangements such as my hon. friend earnestly seeks.

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): Mr. Chairman, when the opposition was forced to accept the resolution preceding the bill we were given to understand that amendments would be considered at the committee stage of the bill. Some amendments have been submitted but none has met with the favour of the minister. I should like to ask the minister at this time, and I hope he will be courteous enough to reply, whether there are any amendments the opposition might offer which would be acceptable to the minister and the committee, and does the minister have any amendments to offer?

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Chairman, I have not had the opportunity of accepting or rejecting any amendment that has been put forward in the committee. No amendment has been found in order and put to the committee by the Chair. All I have argued is the irregularity of them. If any of the amendments had been ruled in order I would have been in a position to say whether they were in accordance with the policy of the government.

All the amendments which have been put forward in the committee and which have been ruled out of order have had to do with one single aspect of medical insurance, namely, the range of professions to be included under this particular bill. It should not come as a surprise to any member of the committee that this bill provides for contributions to provinces in respect of only the services provided by medical practitioners. This was the policy laid down by the Prime Minister in July of last year. This was the policy that was put forward by the Prime Minister at federal-provincial conferences. It has been restated at every federal-provincial conference of ministers of health.

We have stated that the initial stage of insurance for health services in Canada is the making of contributions to provinces in respect of services provided by the medical