

Health Insurance

Mr. Donald M. Fleming (Eglinton): Mr. Speaker, one of the pretensions of the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Martin) with respect to the present bill and the system of hospital insurance that it envisages is that the scheme is of a comprehensive nature. That is a hollow pretence. The scheme is not of a comprehensive nature. It is in fact a scheme of very limited extent.

The limitation of which I wish to speak briefly now is in my submission a most unfortunate limitation. I refer in particular to the express exclusion from this bill and from the scheme for which it provides of patients—whether in-patients or out-patients—in tuberculosis hospitals or sanatoria and in hospitals or institutions for the mentally ill.

From the time this government proposal was first introduced these patients enjoying either in-patient or out-patient services of such institutions have been excluded from any benefit under the scheme. We as a party and as Her Majesty's loyal opposition have already expressed in the strongest terms our view that there is no justification whatever for the exclusion of these hospitals and institutions from among those that lie within the scope of the scheme of hospital insurance.

The hon. member for Lanark (Mr. Blair) in his speech on March 25 set out an unanswerable case in this respect. But from its narrow and stiff-necked position this government has never wavered in this regard. The defence which the Minister of National Health and Welfare has sought to make in this house during the course of consideration of the bill, and last year in the committee on estimates when the whole subject was reviewed by that committee, has been hollow and unconvincing. Indeed, in the case of a minister as loquacious as is the Minister of National Health and Welfare, it has been so hollow as to lead those who know him well to the inevitable conclusion that he himself has no sympathy with the exclusion of the hospitals of the kind of which I have been speaking from the scope of the scheme, and that he is simply trying to defend a compromise in order to protect some of his colleagues in the cabinet who were prepared to go this far and no further.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, may I assure my hon. friend that there is not the slightest foundation for that statement.

Mr. Fleming: I was trying to defend the minister.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Fleming: He has never sounded more hollow and more unconvincing in anything [Mr. Speaker.]

he has said in this house than he sounded in the shilly-shallying excuses that he has made for the exclusion of these institutions.

Does the house adequately realize that if these exclusions are permitted it means that the house is drawing a clear line of distinction between certain types of illness. It means that if patients are suffering from what are called physical ailments and go to hospitals they will fall within the scope of the scheme of this bill. However, if they are suffering from tuberculosis and go to hospitals provided for patients so suffering they will not fall within the scope of the bill. Similarly, in the case of patients suffering from mental illness, if they go to hospitals or institutions designed for the purpose of providing care for such patients then they lie outside the scope of the bill. No scheme which tries to draw a line of distinction between institutions of the kinds of which we are speaking, where the attempted distinction is based upon the type of illness, could possibly be sound.

In the next place, the minister had said, and this must have surprised those who heard him, that the reason why tuberculosis hospitals and sanatoria and hospitals or institutions for the mentally ill are to be excluded from this scheme is that this type of care is already being provided by the provinces at the expense of provincial governments, and in certain cases with contributions from municipal governments as well. He said that the federal government in this respect has no wish to assist the provinces, but only the patients.

It is quite obvious that this government has no wish to assist the provinces; that has been obvious for a long time and in many particulars. I want to make it quite clear that in this regard there is the widest difference between the approach of the government and the approach of Her Majesty's loyal opposition. We of Her Majesty's loyal opposition consider that if the provinces are assisted by the inclusion of institutions of this kind within the proper definition of "hospital" under the bill that would be all to the good. If this government did not characteristically and typically take this rigid, stiff-necked attitude, this unyielding attitude in every matter where the rights or interests of the provinces are concerned, then a great deal more progress would be made in this country in the solution of problems that require a common dominion-provincial approach. In this respect this government is standing in the way of progress and it is doing so without the slightest pretence of even blushing about it.

There is a third aspect to this matter as well. It is the size of the problem presented