

Medicare

Mr. Rynard: It seems that the minister is about to accept the amendment up to a point and then he goes on talking and I wonder how much he accepts. I am in the quandary of not knowing what he means. I know the minister is in a very difficult position, but it seems to me that what he is saying is that he will not trust the provinces to control their own destiny under the medicare plan, even though they might feel that fiscally it would be much better to have a plan carried under a public authority without profit. In other words, the minister is using a big stick and I do not think he should use it, because I am sure that every province will give to its people the best form of insurance that can be given. I am not one of those who believe that a civil servant brought in to do a job will do much better than somebody with years of experience who has kept books in an organization handling medical plans. Possibly, in the long run all these people might be taken into the government; they may all become civil servants and everybody will be working for the government. This is a big danger. I say to the minister that he should leave it to the provinces to determine what they must do.

Mr. MacLean (Queens): I want to ask the minister a question or two about paragraph (a) of subclause 1 of clause 4. If we in this party interpreted the bill as it now is as the minister claims it should be interpreted there would be little disagreement between us. But I do not think the wording of the bill expresses the point of view that the minister maintains it does. I should like the minister to clarify this part of the bill. I should like him to state clearly the point of view he expressed a few moments ago.

• (3:50 p.m.)

This paragraph talks about two different things. The plan is to be operated on a non-profit basis by a public authority. That is obvious. We have no quarrel with the provision that the plan must be "administered" by a public authority. But when it is also said that the plan must be "operated" by a public authority, what exactly does the paragraph mean? To the average person it means that all the work done under the plan has to be done by public employees. That is our interpretation of what it means. Therefore we assume that if the bill is passed in its present form the various organizations to which the minister has referred will be extinguished. If the minister can assure us that this is not the case, our objection will be in great part removed. But I should like to see it more clearly specified in the bill, so that the impression he

has given us will be in accordance with a correct legal interpretation and so that when we speak about a plan being operated by a public authority it does not necessarily mean that all the operations under the plan are carried out by public servants.

Mr. MacEachen: I appreciate that this is a difficult point. It has long been a difficult point for those of us who have been working on the bill. The bill stipulates that there shall be a public authority designated or appointed by the provincial government. As to the details, that is a matter for the provincial government and legislature concerned. The provincial government could designate a department to do this job. It could designate a commission or it could designate a doctor-sponsored group as the public authority. Provinces may not want to do this, but if they do we would not object.

In trying to meet the desire of at least two provinces to integrate within their programs existing doctor-sponsored plans we did examine this paragraph carefully, and we say it is quite possible under the terms of this paragraph for a provincial government to use a physician-sponsored group as part of a public authority, or use the facilities of a physician-sponsored group within the public authority designated. That would be a matter for the province to determine.

Mr. Patterson: The minister has referred to physician-sponsored plans whose facilities could be used. Is he saying that individuals who belong to such plans will be included in the percentage required under the terms of this bill?

Mr. MacEachen: That is a different question. If a physician-sponsored plan were incorporated within the public authority, the number of persons enrolled within that plan would contribute to the proportion to be reached under one of the criteria.

Mr. Forrestall: One further inquiry to satisfy my mind; I am beginning to understand what the minister is driving at, although he seems disinclined to follow the simple procedure I have outlined. Would the minister consider a briefer amendment, one which would simply delete the word "public" in the second line?

Mr. MacEachen: Delete the word "public"?

Mr. Forrestall: Simply delete the word "public". There is a fear in the provinces of getting wrapped up in red tape and cumbersome administrative procedure. This is causing them a good deal of concern.