

*State Medicine*

and recognition of new forms of treatment would be hindered. Greater frequency of periodic health examinations would not bring expected good because they would be superficial and careless. Socialized medicine would tend to increase the number of faddists and quacks; for dissatisfaction with established forms of treatment would drive many to seek other forms of relief. It would result in an enormous bureaucracy with all its disadvantages.

As far as the public is concerned, it would tend to break down self-respect, self-reliance and pride; it would discourage thrift and individual responsibility for one's well-being; it would encourage feigned illness and treatment of many trivial disorders.

My experience as a municipal doctor bears me out in this statement. Many times I have been called twenty miles out in the country for some trivial ailment. The patient could very easily come to the doctor's office. One other abuse was very common. In free hospitalization a patient would ask to be taken to hospital for a common cold. Why shouldn't he go to the hospital? It was free. They paid taxes. The onus of compelling the patient to stay at home was on the doctor. And what excuse could be given if the patient subsequently developed pneumonia?

There is yet another angle. Need I point out to the house the difficulty of Canada competing in world markets if saddled with the financial burden of medical care?

My main objection, of course, is to the doctor becoming the paid employee of the state; for I object whole-heartedly to regimentation and bureaucracy in the care of the sick.

Our medical service is not perfect. Doctors in Canada make no pretence that it is. We have fought persistently to make it better. We have made great strides in the control of communicable disease. In the past twenty-five years the profession has increased the expectancy of life on this continent by fourteen years. Medical service has vastly improved and been extended. I quote the Hon. Doctor Uhrich, Minister of Public Health for Saskatchewan:

We have fought numerous battles with death on many fronts and have won signal victories. Eighty-five years ago, one out of every four Irish immigrants who came to Canada died of cholera; to-day we do not know it as a cause of death in Canada. We have so far eliminated smallpox as a cause of death that, whereas formerly whole villages fell victims to the scourge, we had in 1931 only three deaths in a population of ten million.

We have defeated death on a dozen fronts; we have pushed him back from trench to trench.

[Mr. Fleming.]

I think, Mr. Speaker, it is safe to say that no one in Canada need suffer needlessly at the present time for want of medical attention.

Yet the system of medication has failings, and we as doctors would be foolish not to admit it. Perhaps it is the fault of the "system" or, more properly speaking, the conditions under which we have come to work. I can appreciate that the sponsor of this resolution (Mr. McIvor) has seen these failings, has seen that health conditions could be improved, and has jumped to the conclusion that state medicine is the solution. I say "jumped" to the conclusion, because I do not believe that if the intervening stages had been carefully thought out or if the idea were given the practical test, the idealism which has prompted this resolution would be realized.

I intend to vote against it because I believe it would benefit in the end neither the doctors, the patients nor the general public. No better reasons could be found. I will say this, that I feel confident if the members of my profession were convinced that the last two named parties would greatly benefit, they would be the first to advocate state medicine; for I must say for my fellow practitioners that they are, as a whole, the highest-minded group of men one could be privileged to meet.

We hear so often in the house of a distinguished member of the bar; that so-and-so was a brilliant jurist, an outstanding lawyer; or we read in the papers of counsel in the court room pleading some case. He has all the surroundings that people like to read about, a crowded court room, judge and officers of the court in their robes of office. But look at the picture of the medical doctor in a lowly cottage on the frozen plains of Saskatchewan—miles from civilization—his only light a coal-oil lamp, rendering the greatest service that mankind can offer, saving some poor creature from death, or alleviating pain and suffering—and the public know nothing of it; this house hears nothing of that.

The record of the profession will bear me out. We have realized to the full that our business is to deal in terms of human life. Is there any other profession which has a more consistent record of public service?

Anyone who knows the work of the Canadian Medical Association is fully aware that it is always seeking to improve as well as to maintain the ethics of the profession, while at the same time endeavouring to raise the standard of practice. We have crusaded for health; we have been in the vanguard in trying to improve social conditions; we have given in great measure of our time and energy that the sum total of human happiness might be increased.