

United Nations

languages from ours is a problem. Already many international agencies are trying to standardize, update and make available to all nations the fund of knowledge and the resources that certain favoured countries have at their disposal. We also know how slow the United Nations is to start any action such as that contemplated in this motion. We must begin at some time. In this era, when we are progressing rapidly in fields of science, and especially in the field of medicine and its basic sciences of physics and chemistry, I believe it is desirable that some international body should co-ordinate this work. For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I wish to support the motion of the hon. member for Spadina.

Mr. Winch: May I ask the hon. member a question? Is it correct that all those entering the medical profession throughout the world must know Latin? Is it also correct that prescriptions that are written anywhere in the world will be understood by a doctor in any other part of the world?

Mr. Haidasz: That was the practice in the past; I am referring to that part of the question which related to Latin. Recently, especially in English speaking countries, the trend has been to get away from Latin terminology. This sometimes brings about difficulties, when medical people from various countries get together. Traditionally, in the past, Latin terms were used. After all, medicine and most other sciences were taught in Latin. Originally they were taught in Latin, when teaching first began to be organized in universities. We have inherited that tradition but, as I say, the tendency is to get away from Latin.

I believe the hon. member for Spadina wants to make scientific and technical terms international and standard. In the light of new findings some terms in the English language must be updated. For instance I was reading a technical book about fluorosis. There are many such technical books, and they show the need to standardize technical terms. In view of the rapid progress of medical science and the interdependence of medicine on other sciences, such as pure physics and chemistry, that need exists, even in medicine.

Mr. Nasserden: May I ask the hon. member a question. Does he think it possible that we could improve the legibility of the average medical man's handwriting?

[Mr. Haidasz.]

Mr. D. S. Macdonald (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State for External Affairs): I am not rising to respond to the question of the hon. member for Rosthern though, as a matter of professional courtesy, I might be said to be responding to my colleague who is in the medical profession. I am happy to do so, in that regard.

The remarks which I should like to address to the house on the motion of my colleague, the hon. member for Spadina, may be divided into three parts. The first is with respect to the difficulty posed by the unfortunate problem of language to any prospect of arriving at a satisfactory conclusion in this field. Second, I should like to give some indication of the work which is being done in this sphere, both by the government and by non-government organizations operating at the international level. I should then like to express my own feelings, from experience as an observer at the international level, why I do not feel that the United Nations, as opposed to private organizations, that is, organizations formed by representatives of the professions or disciplines, should be used for this purpose.

● (5:50 p.m.)

The motion deals in part with a subject which is close to the heart of human relationships, that of language. No more obvious support for this proposition could be indicated than the report which has been presented to this parliament within the past 24 hours. We have had this recent example of the tenacity of language and how dearly it is held by the groups which use it. The first comment I would make, therefore, must express a certain scepticism about our ability to arrive at a comprehensive standardization of terms given the great differences which exist between the languages of the human race.

The hon. member for Spadina said he would hope to achieve, through endeavours in the United Nations, a similarity between scientific words in various languages—that they should have the same spelling or pronunciation. I believe my hon. friend would agree there are obvious problems attached to this. It is true that although spelled in the same way, we all recognize, through an examination of the same words as used in German, English, French and Italian, how very different the pronunciation is. A more serious difficulty arises when alphabets such as the Cyrillic are used, or the forms employed when writing Arabic or Chinese.