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## EDITORIAL.

### PATIENTS FIRST.

#### Is Nursing a Profession or a Trade?

A Bill affecting the whole life and condition of service of the Nursing Profession has been introduced into the House of Commons by Mr. Fenner Brockway, supported by eleven members of the Labour Party, under the title of the "Nursing Profession (Wages and Hours) Bill," and a significant fact connected with the proposed legislation is that the promoters have drafted the measure without consulting the Registered Nurses' Organisations, or as far as we know any nurses whatever, concerning their own affairs.

How different are the methods employed by our law makers when legislating for the Working Man; with them, quite rightly, they must confer before Bills affecting their lives are drafted, but apparently this precaution is considered superfluous when attempting to control the highly skilled profession of the Registered Nurse, who may have her work and salary and even her meals arranged for her, without her knowledge much less her approval.

Little wonder that crude and injurious proposals are incorporated in the Nursing Profession Bill, which if passed into law would, without doubt, degrade the highly skilled profession of nursing into a soulless trade.

To turn to the Clauses of the Bill under discussion. It apparently lays down nothing but minimum wages and maximum working hours for the nursing profession, but in so doing it of course touches conditions of training, education and the practice of nursing.

The Act does not only apply to probationers in training, but is to apply to "all Registered Nurses."

Thus in defining that the period of employment for all nurses and probationers shall not exceed:—

1 (a) Forty-four hours during any period of one week ;

(b) Eight hours during any one period of twenty-four hours, except as hereinafter provided.

It thus prohibits a Registered Matron or Sister performing her work of supervision in the hospital or ward for more than eight hours in any one day!

2. No nurse or probationer shall be employed continuously for more than four hours without an interval of at least half an hour for a meal.

It is the first time, we should imagine, that by legislation a professional person shall be compelled to chew the cud or dip in the trough every four hours, whether she wishes to do so or not, irrespective of whether duty makes it impossible for her to down tools for half an hour's interval every four hours!

4. Provides that where it is necessary for the purpose of saving or attempting to save life, eight hours' duty may be extended to twelve, but presumably when the clock strikes the hour—should the patient be *in extremis* or prepared to jump out of the window in his delirium, or the surgeon at a most critical moment of a vital operation, or baby half born—away must depart the sick attendant whatever the disastrous results.

Moreover, the remuneration for the extra four hours must be paid at "one and a half times the normal rate."

In institutions by maddening manipulation of staff "the patients might not be laid out before they were dead," but in private houses the result of this Bill if made law would make it impossible for the sick to receive adequate attention.

Turn to the conditions of Private Nursing. The cost of one Registered Nurse to many patients is now almost prohibitive and is often met out of capital, but if a Registered Nurse may not work for more than eight hours who is going to employ her? Not one person out of a hundred. They will employ the unregistered inferior attendant, who is subject to no drastic and intolerable legislation, and the result will be no work for the efficient, and danger to the sick through ignorance of unqualified attendance.

3. This clause deals with remuneration and provides for a salary of £40, £50 and £60 per annum for probationers in training—the Registered Nurse to receive £75, rising to £100 for sixth year of service.

We strongly approve of from £70 to £100 salary for Registered Nurses, but considering the probationers are provided with board, lodging, washing and uniform and during training with an expensive scholastic course to fit them for the Examinations of the General Nursing Council—that their education and living costs them nothing—high salaries in addition are an excessive drain upon the finances of voluntary hospitals and on the taxpayer in municipal hospitals, and should not be paid.

High salaries and the commercialization of nursing will not encourage the vocational woman to nurse the sick, and it is this humane type "who reacheth out her hands to the needy" who alone can realise joy in it, and sun the sweet flower of our work into beneficence.

We publish the Nursing Profession Bill on page 68, and hope that we have said enough to encourage Registered Nurses to oppose any professional legislation concerning which they have had no opportunity for consideration, and which may be exceedingly injurious to the interests of the community and the Nursing Profession.

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