

## THE NURSES BILL.

On March 17th, Mr. Ernest Brown, Minister of Health, introduced the Nurses Bill into Parliament; it was supported by Mr. Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labour, and the Attorney General.

It is described as a Bill:—

“To provide for the enrolment of Assistant Nurses for the sick, to restrict the name or the title of Nurse, to regulate agencies for the supply of nurses for the sick, and to amend the Nurses’ Registration Act, 1919.”

Having been read a first time, the Bill was put down for Second Reading at the first possible moment on March 24th, and passed, and for Third Reading on April 7th, and passed. Thus, a Bill drafted by the Minister of Health, which had never been submitted for consideration by the hundred thousand Registered Nurses, whose rights and privileges it attacked—and undermined—was rushed through the House of Commons in three weeks (with eleven working days). Sent to the House of Lords this secretive measure will, no doubt, become law at an early date.

The Nurses Bill was primarily promoted by the Association of Hospital Matrons, the Horder Committee of the Royal College of Nursing, with the General Nursing Council, *in camera*, prepared to endorse it.

The inevitable result of this legislation will be to de-grade nursing standards and efficiency, by enrolling semi-trained uncertificated Assistant Nurses, and utilising the Headquarters and administrative staff of the Registered Nurses for the purpose. Never has a more contemptuously unjust Bill been rushed through Parliament by any group of autocratic employers, or Minister of the Crown, upon whose advice our kind King will be compelled to deprive the Registered Nurses of the status and security granted to them in the Nurses’ Registration Act of 1919. We attended the Second Reading of this measure, and listened to the arguments advanced by a dozen old gentlemen, interested in providing public hospitals and institutions with cheap semi-trained nurses for the poor. It was an amazing experience. No woman Member of Parliament took part in the Debate or, indeed, with the exception of Mrs. Tate, was present to listen to it. Miss Florence Horsbrugh, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health, acted as a Greek chorus to sound the death knell of amendments proposed.

And this reminds us that the only amendment of any value was moved by Mr. Geoffrey Hutchinson, M.P., Ilford, who begged to leave out “Assistant Nurses,” and to insert “Nursing Assistants” as the more accurate title of the semi-trained and less misleading to the public. Of course, this amendment was negatived. The Bill was read a third time on April 7th, passed, and sent up to the House of Lords, where on April 13th Lord Snell introduced it by reading a prepared and very misleading statement, when it was committed to a Committee of the Whole House.

This professional journal intends for the sake of historic accuracy, to give full publicity to the evolution of legislation calculated in our opinion to de-grade nursing efficiency; we defer further criticism until a future issue, by which time an Act may be in force.

## THE BRITISH COLLEGE OF NURSES, LTD.

A special meeting of the Council was summoned to meet at 19, Queen’s Gate, S.W.7, on Saturday, March 27th, at 2.30 p.m., to consider the Nurses Bill introduced into Parliament by the Right Hon. Ernest Brown, M.P., Minister of Health, supported by Mr. Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labour and National Service, and Mr. Attorney-General.

Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, President, was in the Chair.

After prayers had been read and the Minutes agreed and signed, the following business was transacted.

### THE NURSES BILL.

It was reported that the Minister of Health, Mr. Ernest Brown, had introduced a Bill into the House of Commons on Wednesday, March 17th, which was read a First time. Without loss of time, Mr. Brown put his Bill down for Second Reading at the first possible moment on March 24th.

Members of the Council attended to listen to the discussion, which was carried on by some 14 persons, mostly middle-aged men interested in Public Health organisation, Sir Francis Fremantle being the only medical man supporting the measure. No woman M.P. took part in the debate with the exception of Miss F. Horsbrugh, C.B.E. (Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Health), who naturally warmly supported the Bill.

The Bill was then given a Second Reading by almost empty benches!

The Council then proceeded to consider the Clauses of the Nurses Bill, which proposes:—

(1) The grade of “Assistant Nurse” (for whom hitherto there has been no accepted definition) should be given a recognised status and placed on a Roll under the control of the General Nursing Council for England and Wales.

(2) Employment agencies should be controlled.

(3) The title of “Nurse” should be restricted to Registered Nurses, enrolled assistant nurses, with certain exceptions.

The Council took strong exception to the following explanatory statement to the Bill, issued by the Ministry of Health.

### Misleading Statement.

“Important measures to safeguard the professional status of nurses and to protect the public from unqualified persons who call themselves ‘nurses’ are proposed in the Nurses Bill, introduced into Parliament by the Minister of Health. The Bill represents a further step taken by the Government to put the nursing profession on a sound footing.”

In the opinion of the Council the Bill did no such thing, it provided for the enrolment (registration) and their protection by the State of thousands of semi-trained, untested women, and of other unqualified persons—by the General Nursing Council—the Governing Body of Registered Nurses in competition with them, their Headquarters, for which they had paid, to be utilised by the Minister of Health for the purpose of professional and economic competition, and was calculated to de-grade the efficient standards of nursing already attained for the safe and efficient nursing of the community.

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