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## EDITORIAL.

### "FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE."

The Editor begs to inform State Registered Nurses that financial assistance is obtainable for those who are penalised by employers and their liberty of conscience denied to them.

Applications should be made to the Editor, who is personally administering the "Freedom of Conscience Fund," to 19, Queen's Gate, Kensington, London, S.W.7.

## NURSES AND TRADE UNIONS

### LIFE OR DEATH FOR THE PROFESSION

The recent action by the Willesden Borough Council in trying to coerce its nurses and employees into a trade union has naturally caused a storm of protest from all freedom-loving people in the country. Such an action is a "straw in the wind," plainly revealing the direction in which our political currents are blowing, and underlining the fact that days of our National freedom are inexorably drawing to a close.

Such a state of affairs existed in Germany before the war, and made Hitler's ascent to power appear to be the normal procedure, and which paved the way for concentration camps and all the other horrors with which we have now become painfully familiar. Is such a state of affairs to be allowed to develop in "this dear Isle, this gem set in a Silver Sea," this bulwark of freedom to which the eyes of all the oppressed in Europe were turned with hope and affection such a very short time ago?

We were lately discussing the "closed shop" policy with a leading trade unionist, who is also a well-known county councillor. He defended the policy by stating that non-members of trade unions received all the benefits of strenuous negotiations which were paid for by the fees of members. He stated that many people refrained from joining trade unions, not because they did not like trade unions, but because they did not like paying fees!

This may be so, and it is a fact that many people, nurses included, will not join an organisation because they will not pay the fee, and it is true that they share the benefits which result from the efforts of an organisation. It seems a pity that some method cannot be devised which would prevent non-members of organisations reaping the same benefits as paying members—rather than to imperil the personal liberties of the individual.

Which brings us to another point. On reading through the various press cuttings relating to the Willesden and Walthamstow affairs, we were horrified to read that the "Matron at Willesden *pleaded* with the authorities to recognise the Royal College of Nursing as

their negotiating organisation"! Surely, if this statement is correct, insult is being added to injury, because it can only mean that the Matron is acquiescing in the Council's demand that the nurses must join a trade union or be dismissed!

Is the Royal College of Nursing setting itself up as a "closed shop" for nurses? Must nurses join the College or be prevented from following their profession? If this is so, then there is no wonder that the profession of nursing is in decline and about to expire. It would be the best thing in the end, and nursing as such could then be reorganised on trade union lines, as a trade.

What is the opinion of the responsible Registered Nurses? Do they intend to be deprived of their liberties and be forced to join a College or a union before they can be accepted for a post? Is no freedom of choice to be allowed them, and is the Royal College going to insist on nurses being deprived of a wholly unfettered choice? The future is indeed gloomy, and only the steadfast and united action of the nurses themselves can dispel this gloom and decide for themselves whether nursing as a profession is to live or die.

The question of the future must not be: Shall a nurse join a trade union or, alternatively, the Royal College? but need a nurse be forced to join a union or the College of Nursing, if she chooses to remain outside all of them?

Here we must confess to the opinion that Registered Nurses, in the interests of posterity and the profession alike, would be well advised to join a professional organisation of their own free choice. "United we stand, and divided we fall" is a well proven maxim. We must all put our money into a nurses' professional organisation, which will jealously guard the interests of the sick we nurse, and the Registered Nurses themselves. We must seek for the organisation which upholds the high ideals of our early and saintly nursing pioneers, and which will not give the hard-won privileges of Registered Nurses to half-trained women, and which is out to safeguard the well-being of our patients, rich and poor alike. The British College of Nurses is such an organisation; nevertheless, rather than attempt to force the liberties of individual Registered Nurses, it prefers to accept members who freely wish to join it, and to endeavour to warn others of the pitfalls which

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