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EDITORIAL

NEW YEAR'S TASKS

The Christmas Holiday is over. The New Year has been safely ushered in to the music of pealing bells. Drifting snow, high gales, fuel cuts and strikes have already greeted the infant year, and there can be no possible doubt that 1947 will have to be a year of tremendous endeavour if our country wishes to regain its former high place amongst the nations of the earth.

Registered Nurses too, must make and keep their New Year resolutions if they are to maintain their privileges and prestige and their former acknowledged position in national affairs. For them, there must be no procrastination, and no tamely giving in to tyrants, nor must they allow themselves to be robbed of their professional freedom and privileges.

There are now many subtle ways by which experienced Registered Nurses are being shorn of their rightful positions and power, and we think it is high time they were warned of the dangers, so that they may be ready to do battle if necessary to keep what is theirs by statutory agreement.

The major attacks recently have been upon the duties and privileges of Matrons of Hospitals. Insidiously, but surely, their authority and power are being stripped from them, and squandered upon unprofessional and unqualified heads of departments. By clever meddling, the Matron's position as Head of the Hospital is being undermined, and the reins of government are passing from her capable hands, so that the smooth working of the institution is shattered. These "heads of departments," such as Food Supervisors, Wardens and Domestic Supervisors, are not responsible for their duties to the Matron, but each separately to the Hospital Committee. Unfortunately, for Patients and Staff alike, these unqualified and inexperienced persons often possess an inordinate desire for complete "boundary" control, and they endeavour to alienate the loyalty of the staff they control away from the Matron and the institution, to themselves.

The result is chaos, endless friction and bickering, so that Matron's duties have developed into those of a perpetual arbitrator, which are depressing and onerous, instead of being constructive, joyful and interesting.

It is absolutely essential for the well-being of any institution that all departments are subject to the authority and wisdom of the Matron, who must be a highly experienced and qualified Registered Nurse. We trust that the Matrons' Association will strictly guard the privileges and prestige of its members, and will take

immediate action when infringements upon the liberties of its members are revealed.

It now appears that there is a formidable body antagonistic to, and jealous of the statutory powers of the General Nursing Council, who would like to see it attacked and, if possible, its powers nullified, so that Hospital Nursing Staffs could be increased by the inclusion of uneducated and inferior types. The Council is being held responsible for the troubles and shortages within the Profession, because it rightly demands the best possible types of Nurses, and insists that Hospitals may not admit inferior candidates. By wise use of its powers, it can impose its will on Hospital Authorities, and insist that Nurses be treated with respect as Students of a first class Profession, and not merely as cheap labour and "pairs of hands," in order to maintain persons drawing large salaries in employment.

We must not allow one iota of authority to be filched from the General Nursing Council, which is the glory and pride of our Profession, and it is up to Registered Nurses to place upon the Council only the finest from their ranks, and to support them in office with the utmost loyalty.

Thirdly, and most shameful action of all, is the attempt by County and Borough Councils to intimidate their Nursing Staffs into becoming members of Trade Unions or Organisations against their consciences and better judgment, or to cease their humanitarian work of nursing the sick. How spineless has the nation become to tolerate such indignity! Forty years ago such attempts upon the liberties of Britons would have caused a civil war or assassination of the offending Government.

It is certainly true that Nurses are not the only body of people whose liberties are threatened, which is a cause for gloom, yet, Nurses by standing firmly together and setting an example of unity and loyalty, might effect a similar firm standing together by other groups of people, to the ultimate good of our country.

It must be clearly understood that by "freedom" of action, we do not mean "licence" or indiscipline.

One of the great paradoxes of life is "the freedom of service," which means one may only be truly free when one is rendering service to one's fellow-men. Nurses must enjoy this higher freedom, which would be menaced were they to be forced into the narrow and soulless confines of a Trade Union. Not for them, the clock-watching and abrupt service to the sick, but the free and generous service of the strong to the weak of the community.

We cannot help thinking that Nurses have, by their own indifference in the past, brought these trials upon

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