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PUBLIC HEALTH IN SOVIETIZED BULGARIA

[Comment: This report is taken from issue No 4, 1955, of Bulgarski Pregled, a bimonthly publication of the Free Europe Committee published in New York. The periodical appears in Bulgarian only and is intended mainly as a means of keeping Bulgarians in exile abreast of events in Bulgaria.]

Much information coming from Bulgaria, obtained either from refugees or from the Bulgarian press, supports the belief that there are serious shortcomings in the scientific and practical training of medical personnel. This fact, augmented by the enormous insufficiency of therapeutic institutions and hospitals and their unbelievably poor equipment, as well as the serious lack of even the most elementary medicines, characterizes the condition of public health services in Bulgaria today. Evidence at hand points to a pronounced deterioration of the population's state of health, a situation which is seriously endangering the physical development of the Bulgarian nation. Under-nourishment, poor housing conditions, and mental suffering are widely current under the "people's democratic" regime and manifest themselves in an unbelievable spreading of diseases and epidemics.

Before 9 September 1944, the medical services in Bulgaria stood at an enviably high position. The situation changed rapidly after the Communists came to power. Health services and facilities were the first to feel the effects of the "people's rule" and to illustrate the destructive character of historical materialism.

Following the Soviet system, the Fatherland Front immediately created a Ministry of Public Health. The first Minister of Public Health was Dr Racho Angelov. However, the actual head of the Ministry was Dr Konstantin Kusitasev, a long-time member of the Communist Party, who died on 20 January 1955; in his post as Chief Secretary of the Ministry, he conducted Communist purges of the country's medical profession during a 5-year period. All the directors of hospitals, chiefs of medical departments, etc., were replaced by party members. Later, the Ministry of Public Health was renamed the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare, under the direction of Dr Petur Kolarov, who completed his medical studies in the USSR and who is the son of Vasil Kolarov.

On 9 September 1944, the Fatherland Front government abolished both the Physicians Union and the Union of Auxiliary Health Workers. At present, all doctors, doctor's assistants (feldsher), midwives, nurses, and medical workers must belong to the government-sponsored General Union of Health Workers.

General health insurance is now compulsory for everyone. According to the ruling on health insurance, everyone receives free medical care but must pay for medicines prescribed, which are dispensed by hospital pharmacies. Persons suffering from chronic diseases and over 50 years of age must buy their medicines from state pharmacies. Medical examinations are no longer performed in the hospitals themselves, but in municipal polyclinics; persons requiring medical treatment are sent to the hospitals from the polyclinics. Sofia is now divided into rayons, each of which has its own polyclinic and corresponding hospital. [There are six rayons in Sofia, but presumably there are more than six polyclinics; Vecherni Novini, 6 October 1955, mentions the 4th, 8th, 12th, 14th, 17th, and 21st polyclinics in Sofia.]

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In addition, the following hospitals are located in Sofia:

1. Sofia University hospital and clinic
2. Institute for Specialization and Advanced Training of Physicians (the former workers' hospital)
3. Communal hospital
4. The Oncological Center (formerly the Dr Varkoni Clinic)
5. Klementinska Hospital
6. Railroad Hospital
7. General Hospital (an entirely new hospital, erected on boulevard Patriarkh Eftimi and headed by Dr Ploskov (fnu))
8. The former Jewish hospital on ulitsa Tri Ushi
9. General Military Hospital
10. Hospital for lung diseases, at the corner of ulitsa Vulkovich and ulitsa 8 Septemvri
11. Bulgarian Red Cross

After their nationalization, all the former private hospitals and clinics were either converted into maternity homes or included as branches into the structure of larger hospitals. With the exception of the General Hospital, all the above-mentioned hospitals existed before 9 September 1944 and at that time had excellent equipment and highly qualified personnel.

The former Jewish hospital, now called "Vulko Chervenkov" Hospital, is spacious and modern and is equipped with all kinds of the latest apparatus and devices for making diagnoses. This hospital is now accessible only to members of the Ministerial Council, members of their families, and higher party and government officials. Persons are admitted to the hospital only with the written permission of the secretariat of the Ministerial Council. Only doctors and medical personnel from the most trusted party circles are assigned to the hospital, and their names are kept secret. This is the only hospital which possesses unlimited quantities of all types of medication and technical equipment for the treatment of all kinds of illnesses.

In the military hospital, only military personnel and officials of the armed forces are treated. Military doctors are obtained in the following manner: Carefully selected young men receive their military training in a special division of the Military College (Voenno uchilishte) while simultaneously attending the Medical Academy. Upon completion of their training, they are automatically assigned as military doctors. These young men are very carefully selected from party youth organizations; preference is given to sons of well-known Communists. As a general requirement, they must have successfully completed all the party propaganda schools. The Military Hospital contains a school for feldshers (now called doctor's assistants), where the feldshers needed by the military services are trained. Young men who have a secondary education are admitted to the school's 3-year course. Upon completion of the course, they are obligated to enter permanent military service, where they can reach the rank of captain.

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The secretary of the party organization in the hospital, together with the party committee, have the right and the duty of observing the work and the conduct of all doctors and other personnel. The secretary is usually also personnel chief, since in his hands is concentrated the power to punish, discharge, etc. The party committee must make reports daily on the departments of the hospital visited and the conditions observed there. Since this committee is made up of assistants and lower officials, it is easy to understand how incompetent the committee is to evaluate the work and value of individual doctors. Doctors are responsible for the equipment assigned to them and for any damage to "socialist property."

Bulgaria now has two higher schools of medicine, one in Sofia and the other in Plovdiv. Immediately after the Communists came to power, basic changes were made in the Medical Faculty of Sofia University. Most of the old and well-known professors were characterized as "facists" and were purged. Among them were the following: Dr Tosho Gosev, neurologist; Dr Penchev (fnu), psychiatrist; Dr Fikov (fnu), specialist in children's diseases; Dr Al. Stanishev, surgeon, given the death sentence for being a former minister; Dr Kamburov (fnu), pathologist, who was attacked by a group of party members during a lecture and died of a heart attack; and Dr Ivan Moskov, specialist in forensic medicine. The Medical Faculty at that time contained only one professor with Communist leanings, namely, Dr Yankov (fnu), ortholaryngologist. After the purge, the professorial chairs were distributed among doctors whose only qualifications were that they belonged to the Communist Party or were party sympathizers.

At present, the teaching staff of the "Vulko Chervenkov" Medical Academy in Sofia consists of the following persons:

Anatomy -- Prof Dr Kedanov (fnu)

Histology -- Prof Dr Khadzhilov (fnu)

Topographic anatomy -- Prof Dr Balan (fnu)

Internal diseases -- First Clinic, Prof Dr Chilov (fnu); Second Clinic, Prof Dr Yonkov (fnu)

Specialized therapy -- Prof Dr Evgeni Nikolov

Surgery -- First Clinic, Prof Dr Kapitanov (fnu); Second Clinic, Prof Dr Tomov (fnu)

Skin and venereal diseases -- Prof Dr Lyuben Popov

Children's diseases -- Prof Dr Lyuben Rashev [Rachev?]

Neurology and psychiatry -- Prof Dr Uzunov (fnu)

Hygiene -- Prof Dr Panov (fnu)

Forensic medicine -- Prof Dr Marko Markov

Pathology -- Prof Dr Orakhovats (fnu)

In addition to the medical academies, Bulgaria has the following advanced special institutes of medicine:

1. The Oncological Institute, for cancer research; directed by Dr Gotse Tenchov

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2. ISUL (Institute for Specialization and Advanced Training of Doctors); directed by Prof Dr Tashev (fnu); his assistants are Dr Ivan Penchev and Dr Tsonchev (fnu). The surgery department is headed by General Dr Stoyanov (fnu) who trained in the USSR and has a reputation as a "butcher."

3. The Institute of Public Health, which has bacteriological and serum departments

An order which became effective several months ago prohibits physicians from using the titles "doctor" or "professor." The following new designations have been created: Candidate of Medical Sciences, Doctor of Medical Sciences, and Academician. A physician who wishes to use the title "Candidate of Medical Sciences" must take a special examination in historical and dialectical materialism, as well as in his specialty. The title "Doctor of Medical Sciences" requires, in addition to the above examination, a scientific dissertation. Bearers of the title "Academician" are selected from those holding the title "Doctor of Medical Sciences." The purpose of this reform, fashioned on the Soviet model, is to create a hierarchy of scientific workers with proven loyalty to Communism.

According to Communist claims, there are now approximately 9,000 practicing physicians in Bulgaria. All physicians are obliged to work for the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare, in the place and the position assigned by the Ministry. Physicians are not prohibited from having private practices, but after fulfilling their obligatory work for the state and under the tension of fulfilling high production norms, and after attending obligatory political conferences and meetings, the physicians have little time left for private practice. On the other hand, the exceptionally low incomes of the population do not permit persons to go to physicians for private treatment. Physicians' wages under the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare fluctuate between 600 and 1,000 leva per month. The fee for private visits is fixed at 8 leva.

Only well-known physicians can boast of a private practice. The best-known is Dr Tsonchev (fnu), who is considered the best physician in Bulgaria today. Other well-known physicians are the following: Dr Angel Popov; Dr Boris Razsolkov, cardiologist; Dr Evgeni Nikolov; Dr Tomov (fnu), surgeon; Dr Kapitanov (fnu), surgeon; Dr Kamburov (fnu), roentgenologist; Dr Khr. Penchev; Dr Lyuben Kovachev; Dr G. Yankov; and Dr Erofim Khristov, roentgenologist. It is noteworthy that physicians who completed their training after the Communists came to power do not have the confidence of the population.

According to information coming from Bulgaria, tuberculosis is widespread. It has been estimated that not less than 35 percent of the population suffers from tuberculosis. A large part of the population also suffers from stomach ulcers. The reasons for this are the following: undernourishment; heavy and fatiguing work, due to the unduly high norms in all fields; intolerable nervous tension, a result of the constant fear of informers, persecution, arrest, etc.; lack of funds for treatment and rest; and a shortage of drugs and medicines.

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