

A Member Resigns

SIR,—Your leading article (Jan. 30, p. 135) is unusual, alike in its choice of subject and in its treatment of that subject. The curious mixture of the self-assertive, the faintly deceptive, the slightly minatory, and the suddenly plaintive suggests a comparison—from which all right-minded B.M.A. members will instantly recoil—with the curious present-day gyrations of a certain totalitarian propaganda machine.

With your contention that many B.M.A. members are lukewarm in their support of the Association I am not at the moment concerned, true though it is in fact. It cannot, however, be doubted that Service members have had little or no voice in the planning of the future of our profession and, in the nature of things, this cannot, at the moment, be otherwise. The Secretary's account of his successful negotiations with the Director-General of the Army Medical Services, resulting in permission being granted to R.A.M.C. officers to record and transmit their views on medical planning, touches only the fringe of the subject. Such permission can be of value only to the R.A.M.C. officer serving in this country, and, in fact, its value is theoretical rather than practical. The R.A.M.C. officer, be he administrator, specialist, or humble general duty officer, is, contrary to popular belief, already fully occupied with the very necessary task of helping to win the war. So far as our armies over-seas are concerned, one hesitates to ponder the replies from colleagues in the jungles of Burma, the sands of Libya, or the mud of Tunisia to an inquiry on their views of the future of our profession. Such replies, we hazard, would be bright and brief, if not particularly brotherly. Incidentally, we are not told whether similar freedom to express their views has been accorded to our colleagues in the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force.

Doubtless our naval friends, fighting their way round Murmansk in the teeth of the blizzard, and in the face of the unwelcome attentions of the Luftwaffe and the U-boat packs, are giving the matter their most serious consideration. Nor can we expect a carefully balanced judgment from the not inconsiderable number of our colleagues who are at the moment in enemy hands.

Your plea on behalf of a mythical centenarian covers only one side of the question. Every well-brought-up young man should be eager to profit from the advice of his elders, but it cannot be gainsaid that our venerable Nestors when talking to (or down to) their juniors are a little apt to dilate at length on the verdure of the fields of their youth and/or on the excellence of the Biblical injunction touching the matter of yokes and young shoulders. With particular reference to present, and to future, problems they tend to overlook the probability that post-war pastures will yield more thorns than grass, and that post-war yokes will be of a much heavier pattern than heretofore.

Planning now for the future of our profession is necessary, but the translation of the plans into action must be deferred until members of the profession, temporarily in the Forces, have returned home at the end of the war and have had time and opportunity to study the problem in all its aspects.—I am, etc.,

JOHN M. HENDERSON,
Major, R.A.M.C.

SIR,—I do not think the B.M.A. has ever made any serious attempt to find out why it is that seven out of every eight members are politically inarticulate. Does not this problem merit some attention at Headquarters? It is not enough for the Association to say that the machinery is there and that if members do not make use of it nothing more can be done.

The B.M.A., in appointing the Medical Planning Commission—without any mandate from its members—has assumed the responsibility of guiding the profession through the troublous times ahead. Very well then, is a C.O. who never leaves his office entitled to assume that his unit is a happy one because he never receives complaints from his personnel through the official channels? There is a reason for the apparent apathy of the average medical man towards his own political interests, but the Association will not find out what it is by sitting in Tavistock Square. I would suggest that "Centenarian" comes out into the Provinces and finds out for himself.

It is not that the ordinary doctor has no views on matters of vital importance to himself; it is that he cannot use the machinery provided to make those views known. Theoretically it should work very well, actually it does not, because a G.P. nowadays has no time to give to secretarial duties, Division meetings, visits to London, etc. Consultants and specialists can arrange their work to a large extent, but a G.P. is tied to the telephone in a way that is quite incredible to those who have not experienced it. And the ordinary G.P. represents two-thirds of the profession.

The A.R.M. is a clumsy and lazy way of canvassing the views of the profession. The political landscape changes from day to day; Representatives meet once or twice a year, and experience quickly shows a G.P. the futility of trying to put his views across through the official channels. No wonder he is exasperated into displays of the arrogance which so scandalizes "Centenarian." Let the Association take a lesson from the defence of Leningrad; during the siege Party members were in and out of the trenches day and night, encouraging, advising, and directing. They did not call men off work which they cannot possibly leave to hold meetings. The mountain will not go to Mahomet, and if Mahomet will not go to the mountain he will lose his status as a prophet. Association Representatives must contact the profession on the spot, and it is no good saying that it can't be done. Trade union officials and M.P.s do not find it impossible to contact their constituents.

G.P.s as a body are suspicious of the negotiations now proceeding; they are exasperated and may easily break away altogether. I forecast this eventuality in a letter to the *Journal* some months ago as the outcome of the appointment of the Medical Planning Commission. I should deplore this result as much as "Centenarian," and I should cordially agree with his expectation of being made a scapegoat.—I am, etc.,

Lancaster.

C. J. STOCKER.

SIR,—I have often wanted to resign from the B.M.A. I have refrained because I considered that the head and not the heart was at fault; but how are you to remedy a mental defect in a corporation? You, Sir, claim that the B.M.A. merely represents its members' opinions. How can it represent some thousands of divergent ideas, especially when, as on most of the questions the last few years, which are basically financial, there are diametrically opposing groups of the "haves" and "have nots"?

Bacon observes that "truth is more likely to come out of error than out of confusion." Interpreted by Prof. Leonard Gamgee in his lectures: "The next best thing to being definitely right is being definitely wrong." Now, I do not advocate the Council acting rightly or wrongly in defiance of the members, but I do suggest that, given the very large agreement we have on very important minor matters—such as reasonable income, hours, facilities, etc., for medical men—it probably does not make much difference what major decisions are taken providing the Council does obtain a decision and act on it; but this would appear impossible when Representatives are sent from the local meetings with binding resolutions. They must come armed with the opinions they have formed at the local meetings but be prepared to formulate a policy of their own—i.e., of the Representative Meeting as a whole. How could Parliament carry on if each member could only vote on the majority instructions from his constituency?

As I would blame a clergyman for empty pews, so I would blame the B.M.A. (for the fault is too general for local blame) for lack of interest in its meetings. When a member can speak at the Divisional meeting knowing that even if his own resolution is not accepted it will bear some weight with his Representative, he will come to speak, but at present, unless he has exceptional and dangerous influence as a speaker, a man may justly say: "Why should I waste my time; the committee has everything cut and dried?" Finally, I would say that if this plan cannot be carried out, and if this stage of confusion is not to lead to an anaesthesia from which we wake to find that the Ministry of Health has removed not only our income but our independence, the only alternative is for the B.M.A. to remove our independence first, and then tell us exactly what we are to think and do.—I am, etc.,

Birmingham.

W. BRIAN GOUGH.