

Attitude of Association Explained

Referring today to the proposed amendment of the Dental Act as introduced by the Hon. H. Tassie in the Legislative Council on Tuesday, Dr. A. P. R. Moore (president of the South Australian branch of the Australian Dental Association) said that in view of the fact that this matter was receiving a certain amount of public attention and that the attitude of members of the dental profession toward the amendment had been misrepresented in the press, he would like, on behalf of the council of the Australian Dental Association, to make the following statement:—

"On reading the report of Mr. Tassie's remarks it appears that the principal object of his amendment is to alter the constitution of the Dental Board. If this had been necessary members of the dental profession would undoubtedly have approached the Government with such a request. Sir Wallace Bruce (chairman of the board) is appointed by the Government, and on several occasions has suggested that a dentist should occupy his position. The dentists themselves, however, feel that an impartial chairman for the Dental Board is of inestimable assistance to that body and therefore very desirable, as also are representatives from the British Medical Association. If Mr. Tassie had consulted those whom he suggests are going to benefit by the proposed alteration to the constitution of the Dental Board, he would not, unless with some ulterior motive, have misrepresented the case as has been done.

"He has possibly mentioned his amendment to one or two individual dentists, but he has not approached responsible bodies such as the Dental Board, the British Medical Association, the University, the Dental Association, or the Students' Society, all of whom are opposed to the amendment that is now before the Legislative Council.

"We must conclude, therefore, that most if not all of Mr. Tassie's information has been derived from unregistered dental assistants, a select section of whom he is attempting to hoist upon the public as fully qualified dental practitioners. Mr. Tassie's remarks concerning the Dental Board and the Dental Association portray a complete ignorance of the respective functions of these bodies.

CONSTITUTION OF BOARD

"The constitution of the board, whose duty it is to administer the Dental Act, can have no possible effect upon the existence of the Dental Association, which is a society of dentists who wish to cultivate a spirit of professional fellowship; to read and to discuss papers on dental subjects; and to foster aims that may be conducive to the advancement of the status of dentistry.

"During Mr. Tassie's term of office as Chief Secretary the Dental Hospital was in his charge, and during that period it is unquestionably true that a certain number of patients, in a position to consult a private dental practitioner, gained admission to that institution. The Dental Board had no more power than Mr. Tassie possessed to prevent these deplorable occurrences, and no advantage could possibly follow alteration of the existing scheme of management.

"In view of the fact that responsible organisations had no intimation whatsoever of Mr. Tassie's altruistic motive to reconstitute the Dental Board, we suspect that the suggestion is merely a mask clouding the more serious proposal of the amendment, namely, to admit a limited number of operative assistants to become registered as dentists without demanding of them any educational requirements whatsoever, and despite the stipulations contained in the Dental Act since 1904 concerning entrance to the profession.

"Concerning this suggestion the Registrar of the Dental Board has made the following very logical statement:—'If the admission of these 15 operative assistants (on the farcically modified examination principle advocated by Mr. Tassie) will lift the status of the profession it should no longer be necessary to provide any University or Dental Board examinations. And those students who at present and in the past have respected the demands set forth in our dental legislation must come to the conclusion that they have been most infamously hoaxed into spending time and money upon an unnecessary training, and would be justified in demanding compensation from legislators, who 25 years ago agreed that any person wishing to practise dentistry should undergo a specified course of training.

"The examination asked for is not similar to that demanded of final year dental students. It is, however, similar to that conducted following the 1917 amendment of the Dental Act. This was a form of examination far more lenient than justice demanded, but condoned by the profession as certain operative assistants may have suffered an injustice under the Dental Act as amended at that date.

NO DISABILITIES

"The present operative assistants do not suffer any disabilities which in any way entitle them to the consideration afforded in 1917. The 1917 amendment defined clearly the position of an operative assistant and gave no grounds whatsoever for such persons to consider that they should

become registered dentists except through the regular channels of entry to the profession, namely, the University course or the Dental Board course.

"The latter course may be taken one subject at a time (if so desired), and this can easily be accomplished by a person who has to earn his living, and even support a family. Many men in the profession have done this, and others are at present engaged in such study. It is not an expensive course.

"If Parliament now grants operative assistants the right to present themselves for a modified and altogether inadequate examination it will establish a very dangerous precedent for the future.

"As we shall still have to consider those operative assistants who have not had seven years of experience as such, actually the legal and moral rights of all operative dental assistants are absolutely identical; but if the present amendment were passed a number of assistants would be deprived of their livelihood. Such a state of affairs could not be countenanced for long, and we should soon have a further amendment to provide for assistants who had six years of experience, and then another for those with five years' experience, and so on ad lib.

"In other parts of the world the standard of dental education is being raised, not lowered.

"The 1917 examination (which it is proposed to repeat this year if amendment is passed) permits the operative assistant to present himself three times—that is he has three chances. If the experience of the operative assistants has rendered them sufficiently competent to become dentists without fulfilling any of the prescribed educational requirements surely one examination should suffice.

"If the operative dental assistants were a menace to graduates from the University, as stated, then the graduates and dental students would be heartily supporting the amendment. Not in one single instance is this the case.

"MENACE TO GRADUATES"

"Operative dental assistants inflicted upon the public as qualified dentists would, however, be a real menace to graduates, as they would inevitably lower the status of our profession. In certain large practices operative assistants are necessary, but before being so recognised an operative assistant should have to give evidence to the Dental Board that he possessed a certain degree of proficiency.

"Our present Dental Act unfortunately is weak in this respect. To rectify the weakness it is not in any way necessary to register operative assistants as dentists. They should be registered as operative dental assistants and future operative dental assistants should have to fulfil a modified course of training to equip them for their duties. This would solve the whole problem without the slightest possibility of an injustice to anyone; but would not be acceptable to those operative assistants who are seeking an improper method of entry into the ranks of registered dentists.

"The operative dental assistants claim that the practice of dentistry has made substantial progress since 1917 (we all agree), yet they now wish to have the same standard of examination as obtained at that date for operative assistants who to use their terms were eight parts mechanic and two parts operative assistant.

"It is a fact that the relative number of dentists in Victoria and New South Wales is very much higher than in South Australia. The insinuation, however, that South Australia is understaffed is not a fact. The eastern States have many more dentists than they desire or require.

"To close their Dental Acts—as we thought we had done in 1917—these States have recently admitted to the dental register hundreds of mechanics and operative assistants without any examination at all—as a result of this drastic but expedient action the position in these States is now critically acute.

"No students will undertake the prescribed course of study.

"GROSS MISREPRESENTATION"

"Melbourne Dental Hospital usually has four times as many new students as Adelaide; they now have less than we do. To get rid of their surplus supply of incompetent, half-baked dentists, New South Wales and Victoria are clamoring for an indiscriminate interstate reciprocity for dentists. If reciprocity on a basis other than now existent is even sanctioned we can expect an influx of the least competent dentists from the eastern States.

"It has been stated in the press and elsewhere that the majority of the dentists endorse the measure brought forward by Mr. Tassie. This is a gross misrepresenta-

tion and could not be substantiated by those responsible for it.

"During this year the Dental Association conducted a secret ballot to determine how many of its 120 members favored an amendment of the Dental Act upon the lines now under consideration. Only 13 replied in the affirmative.

"It is significant that the members of the Operative Dental Assistants' Association who are now very anxious to raise the status of dentistry (?) by becoming registered dentists in an anomalous manner should have made no attempt whatsoever during their seven years of experience to raise the status of dentistry in the only way legally open for them to do so—namely by undertaking the Dental Board course of study. Many others have honorably accomplished this, and others again are even now doing so.

"If there are no other persons entitled to be classed as operative assistants (this claim is made by members of the Operative Dental Assistants' Association) then the 'operative assistant clause' even as it now stands, can not be doing any harm to anyone, as there have apparently been no additions to the ranks of assistants for seven years.

"In the interests of the public, and in view of disastrous errors already made, it would be a calamity if our legislators followed the dictates of a small group of 15 unqualified dental assistants and ignored the opinion of the University, the British Medical Association, the Dental Board, the dental students, and the dentists themselves upon this important matter."

A do. 27-10-30

TO ANTARCTIC VOYAGE OF THE DISCOVERY Final Arrangements

Melbourne, October 26. The last meeting before the departure of the expedition ship Discovery for the Antarctic on November 1, was held yesterday.

The principal business was the appointment of two members of the scientific party to replace Commander Moyes and Mr. J. W. Marr, who will be unable to accompany the expedition. Commander Moyes's position was filled by the appointment of Mr. Alec Kennedy, an accomplished land surveyor and physicist, who accompanied the first Mawson expedition, 1911-1913, and who was a member of the western party which operated in Queen Mary Land. Mr. Marr, who was the planktonologist of the expedition, will be replaced by a naval surveyor to be appointed by the Naval Board within a few days.

The provisional appointment of Mr. A. M. Stanton as second officer of the Discovery was endorsed by the committee. Captain Mackenzie, who succeeded Captain J. K. Davis as commander of the Discovery, also succeeds him as second in command of the expedition.

Sir Douglas Mawson announced that an agreement had been reached with the Ross Harvet Whaling Co. for the transport of 100 tons of coal for the expedition from New Zealand to the Antarctic circle by the whaler Sir James Ross Clark. This will enable the Discovery to remain in the Antarctic for a longer period than previously.

By courtesy of Amalgamated Wireless, Ltd., special wireless apparatus has been installed on the Discovery, which it is expected will enable a series of weekly descriptive talks to be broadcast from the Discovery.

Captain Hurley will again accompany the expedition as official photographer, and he will broadcast the messages. The Discovery will proceed to Hobart from Melbourne, and is expected to leave that port on November 15. It is probable that the first port of call after Hobart will be Macquarie Island.

Ref 27-10-30

"CONSIDER ECONOMIC POSITION OF S.A."

Vice-Chancellors Advice To W.E.A. Students

Students of the Workers' Educational Association should form a group to consider the economic position of South Australia, the Vice-Chancellor of the University (Sir William Mitchell), said at the annual meeting of the Association in the Stow Hall on Saturday night.

"Experts on special subjects could be asked to attend and explain vital questions," he said. "The group might try to answer the question, 'What will be the position of the State five years hence?'"

"They could discuss questions of impor-

taunce affecting the community, and arrive at some conclusions about them. The results might be embodied in a book.

"They could discuss the perilous position of the wheat market, the agricultural system, the competition of artificial wool, transport, and the bearing of municipal control on social and industrial life."

When he came to Australia some years ago there was a time of depression similar to that at present, and he remembered a professor of economics suggesting that the human element should be capitalised, and compared with the dead capital of the country, such as railways, machinery, money, and so on.

Then it would be found that the value of the living capital was four or five times that of the dead capital.

It was unfortunate that the living capital of the State was at present developing into a debt instead of a credit. That made it all the more necessary that they should get the people all at work and doing the work for which they were best fitted.

Adv. 27-10-30

DENTAL REFORM

"OPERATIVE ASSISTANTS" QUESTION

To the Editor. Sir—I see it stated, in reference to the proposed amendment of the Dental Act, that "operative dental assistants inflicted upon the public would be a real menace to graduates, as they would inevitably lower the status of our profession." More than 60 of them were inflicted upon the public by the 1917 and subsequent Acts, and are now legally qualified dental practitioners. Most of them state that they are qualified by examination, and 99 per cent. of the public think that they have fulfilled the requirements of a university course in dentistry. The law should require them to place a distinguishing sign on their name-plates. We should then not have such small numbers of students in the dental courses at our universities; and our students, upon graduation, would find it less hard to make a living. Quite enough have already entered the profession in Australia by a back-door method.

If it be true that "in certain large practices assistants are necessary," they should be legally qualified, as they undertake everything that a dental surgeon usually does. A medical practitioner having a large practice can make use only of properly qualified assistants. Would the British Medical Association tolerate a Medical Act which permitted each registered practitioner to employ two unqualified persons. Would the public tolerate it? Would the public tolerate unqualified assistants in "certain large practices" if they knew.

Our present Dental Act allows each registered dentist to employ two unqualified assistants. It would be within the law for a dentist to employ the village blacksmith, or a bricklayer, to perform dental operations "under his supervision"—in the next room, or may be in the next town. As long as this is allowed there will be recurring batches of these "operative assistants" asking Parliament for recognition. Assistants are necessary to all dentists who have large practices, but they should be properly qualified, or their duties definitely limited.

Section 5 of the present Bill would do away with unqualified assistants. Surely the Dental Board, the British Medical Association, the University, the Dental Association, and the Students' Society, are not opposed to this reform!

Past medical members of the board have repeatedly stated that the board should consist of dentists and a layman. With the present constitution of two medical practitioners, two dentists and a layman, a quorum of three could have no dentist at all. Is this desirable? There have been only four different dental members of the board during the last 24 years. Some of the "disastrous errors already made" may be closely related to this fact.

Section 6 says that the board must hold a yearly meeting of registered dentists, give a report, and publish a balance-sheet. This is highly desirable. Each registered dentist has paid £2 2/ annually since 1902, but does any member of the above-mentioned bodies know how much has been collected during the 28 intervening years, and what has been spent? Do these bodies oppose section 6?

Section 4 should not give operative assistants the opportunity of becoming registered. They became operative assistants with a full knowledge of the prescribed course for entry to the profession. They should be registered as operative assistants only, after an examination. With the qualifications I have mentioned, I regard the Bill as promising well both for public and the dental profession.—I am, Sir, &c.,

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