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BULGARIA

HEALTH /1600/
Doctors /1605/

DOCTORS SINK TO STATUS OF MERE BUREAUCRATS.

SOURCE ISTANBUL: A 29-year-old Bulgarian M.D., a graduate of PLOVDIV University, who worked as a district doctor until his escape to Turkey in November 1955.

DATE OF OBSERVATION: Until November 1955.

EVAL. COMMENT: This report well illustrates the situation of doctors in Bulgaria. Although they are considered to be part of the Regime favored intelligentsia, this report describes their actual situation. As in all fields of economy, where private initiative is frowned upon, the same practice is applied to MDs wishing to open a private clinic. Although private practice after completing State-paid activities is not forbidden, the Regime takes all sorts of indirect measures to discourage doctors from treating patients privately.

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"According to a law passed by the Communist Bulgarian National Assembly, all people exercising the medical profession must be working for the State, i.e. they must be State employees. In actual practice, this means that all doctors must spend half a day each day working for the Ministry of Health and Public Welfare. In the afternoon, most doctors are allowed to hold a private practice. Any doctor who wants to own a private clinic may do so after getting the necessary authorization from the county medical organization. Getting such a permit does not involve any expenditure and, as far as I know, no doctor so far has been refused such permission.

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"Despite the fact that having a private practice is not forbidden by law, most young doctors in present day Bulgaria think twice before opening a clinic of their own. The reasons for this are manifold: the Bulgarian State, opposed to private ownership and individual earnings, does not look favorably upon those who work as competitors of the State medical organization. Young doctors are discouraged from opening clinics and they are told by their superiors that their patients would have difficulties in being admitted to hospitals, that they would be unable to receive the necessary medicines and that the doctor himself would be hampered in getting promoted. A young doctor is told that a true socialist healer should be at the service of mankind disregarding completely whether the patient can or cannot pay for his treatment. Doctors have to attend professional meetings and during these those who have expressed the desire to start a private practice are publicly criticized for their "lust for financial profit." In short, a doctor wishing to own his private practice is subject to all sorts of moral pressure. This campaign has had its results: statistically speaking, more than 75 per cent of the doctors in Bulgaria who own clinics belong to the elder generation, i.e. the pre-1944 class.

"Another measure being applied against doctors with private practices is to have them transferred from one town to another. As every doctor is a State employee he cannot protest governmental orders telling him to move to another town. My eldest brother, Dr. Angel VAKRILOV, who owns a clinic at PLOVDIV, received orders in 1953 to report for work at PIRVI MAY /ex BORISOVGRAD./ The reason for this order was that my brother had a large and well-paying private clientele. It took him many months to arrange the cancellation of this transfer order. My other brother, who in 1954 was working as district doctor at LESOVO, was transferred to the village of STEFAN KARADZHOVO because he had a private practice at LESOVO. Although every doctor is entitled to get paid for his services in the afternoons, i.e. after his official work is done, my brother decided to give up his private practice fearing that he would lose his job completely. Dr. MINEV, one of the best known gynecologists in PLOVDIV, was transferred to BURGAS in 1953 and thus was forced to give up his lucrative private practice.

"Some doctors with many years' training in their fields are allowed to carry on a private practice without opposition from the State, but these have to pay extremely high taxes.

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For instance, my eldest brother had to pay a 20,000 leva tax in 1955. No one quite knows how these taxes are figured out. The fact remains, however, that it increases annually, the ultimate aim being to force the doctors to abandon their private practice. I remember that Dr. BOCHEV, PLOVDIV's leading gynecologist, had to pay an 80,000 leva tax in 1953. By asking for such astronomic taxes the State makes it virtually impossible for the doctors to make a profit on their private practice. Doctors who do not have a private practice are subject to an annual tax of only 500 to 1,000 leva.

"A doctor may charge 8 to 10 leva for a visit while specialists and professors charge 20 to 30 leva. When going to the homes of their patients doctors may charge 25 to 40 per cent more.

"The State pays a standard salary to its doctors. The monthly pay of doctors all over Bulgaria has been fixed at 540 leva. Professors and specialists may get an additional 100-200 leva but that is all. Only when performing more than one job may a doctor get a few extra leva. Thus, for instance, district doctors often have to look after maternity wards and pharmacies as well, for which jobs they may get another estimated 200 leva per month.

"It will be seen clearly that the medical profession in present day Bulgaria is no longer regarded as a respectful and lucrative one. Doctors have been degraded to become simple government officials and in many cases an ordinary unskilled worker's wages amount to more than the salary of a specialized doctor."

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