

THERE IS STILL TIME!

An Appeal To All Members Of The Legislative Assembly Of Ontario To Oppose A Decision By The Minister Of Health To Force Denturists To Work Under The Control Of Dentists!

BILL 203

On June 26, 1972, Bill 203 "An Act to Provide for the Licensing and Practice of Dental Technologists" was introduced in the Legislature by the Honourable Robert Welch acting on behalf of the Honourable R. T. Potter, Minister of Health.

Mr. Welch, in his comments made on introduction of the Bill, stated that "the purpose of the Bill was to create a new dental health worker (modelled unquestionably after denturists) who would be permitted to deal directly with the public in the provision of full upper and lower dentures." The Bill did NOT provide for any supervision of these people by dentists.

The introduction of Bill 203 caused an immediate uproar in the ranks of organized dentistry. The profession saw in Bill 203 a threat to their monopoly over the provision of all types of dental services. Dentists everywhere throughout Ontario mounted an extensive campaign against the proposed legislation and concentrated their lobbying efforts on Members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. The Denturist Society, in response to the campaign launched by dentists, sought assurances from Members of the Legislature (cabinet ministers and back benchers alike) that Bill 203 would receive sufficient support to ensure its passage through the Legislature. We were told again and again that the Bill was really government policy and "was not subject to change." We were led to believe that any amendments would be of a "minor nature" and it would be "left up to the regulations which would go forward with the Bill to define more precisely, education, qualifications, licensing, and the scope of practice of the new dental health practitioner."

AN ABOUTFACE

On Tuesday, December 5th, however, the Minister of Health, Honourable R. T. Potter, attempted to push through second reading in the Legislature an amended version of Bill 203 — amendments that were designed to place denturists under the complete control of dentists. Strong criticism of this attempt obliged the Minister to withdraw the Bill. Later that same evening, however, Health Minister Potter announced his intention to reintroduce legislation to replace Bill 203. This new legislation will undoubtedly incorporate the specific amendments which denturists opposed, namely, that the new dental health worker will be controlled and supervised exclusively by dentists in the same manner as dental hygienists, dental nurses, dental assistants and dental technicians are presently controlled and supervised.

This latest move by the Health Minister is nothing less than a complete reversal of what we were led to believe was the unalterable policy of the government.

ANOTHER DENTAL AUXILIARY

Thus the new dental health worker will become just another dental auxiliary, added to a long list of dental auxiliaries who are controlled exclusively by dentists and who have been developed mainly for the purpose of providing an additional financial arm to enhance the income of practicing dentists.

HOW WILL THE PUBLIC BE AFFECTED BY THESE DEVELOPMENTS?

The Denturist Society is of the firm opinion that the new legislation incorporating the requirement of supervision by dentists, will be emptied of all meaning for the public as no substantial benefits will occur to those in need. Experience has taught us that no reduction in costs for dental health care occurs through the creation of dental auxiliaries. Moreover, people will be obliged to secure needed denture services only through facilities operated and controlled by dentists. Additionally, if denturists are to be eliminated as a competitive factor (which is what will surely happen if the Minister of Health does not reverse his decision) dentists will again have a free hand to charge whatever they please for their services, notwithstanding the empty promises of the dental profession that they will lower the prices of dentures if they are granted control over denturists.

A MATTER OF URGENCY

It is a matter of urgency, therefore, that the government of this province, BEFORE endorsing any such move on the part of the Minister of Health to create another meaningless dental auxiliary, should take into account that there are too few dentists to serve the needs of the people of this province. Supervision and control therefore would oblige all persons seeking the services of denturists to obtain these only through existing dental offices.

SUPERVISION BY WHOM?

This Society is not opposed to rigorous and stringent licensing requirements. We are not opposed to a licensing board and are most certainly not opposed to formal training, but it is sheer nonsense for the Minister to call for supervision of our activities by the very profession which in our opinion is at least partially responsible for the dental cripples who daily attend at denture clinics for dentures to replace teeth lost through inept or inadequate dental care. It must be stated therefore, that most persons who have lost some or all of their natural teeth

are living testimony to the fact that the dental profession has failed miserably in its primary purpose, namely that of providing adequate dental care for the people of Ontario.

It must also be stated that the majority of persons who attend at the offices of denturists are already wearing dentures provided by dentists — dentures that were ill-fitting and non-functional. ARE THESE DENTURISTS WHO WERE UNABLE TO SATISFY THE NEEDS OF THEIR OWN PATIENTS, REGARDLESS OF THE COSTS, TO BE GRANTED SUPERVISION OF DENTURISTS WHICH WOULD EMPOWER THEM TO DECIDE WHETHER DENTURISTS HAVE SUCCEEDED WHERE THEY HAVE FAILED?

Seen in this light, the concept of dental supervision is so irrational that one can only speculate that the Minister of Health, who has admitted publicly on numerous occasions that he will not meet with or even talk to denturists, has apparently yielded to the specious arguments advanced by dentists.

SHOULD THE PUBLIC BE IGNORED?

Over the past several months, members of the public have written countless letters of support for denturists. Many of these letters were directed to the Minister of Health. In nearly every instance, such letters endorsing the services performed by denturists, were written by patients of denturists. It is very apparent to us now, that not only were our recommendations and opinions totally ignored, but those of the public as well.

Clearly there is a principle at stake here and that principle is that the public should have the right to select denture services on the basis of preference. If the public prefers the services of a denturist rather than those provided by dentists, they should be allowed to do so provided that their oral health needs will not be endangered.

NO HEALTH HAZARD

The Denturist Society submits that the activities of denturists do not constitute a health hazard and we challenge any responsible authority to prove otherwise. At the present time there are more than ninety denture clinics throughout Ontario operated by denturists who are members of the Denturist Society. Something in the order of 700 to 900 persons attend daily at these clinics, which is an average of 12,000 to 14,000 persons monthly. Surely, if the activities of denturists posed a threat to the oral health of these people there would be widespread evidence of such. Where is the evidence? We acknowledge the human fac-

tor and accept that mistakes can be made, but we insist that with very few exceptions denturists have performed and are performing competently, with a degree of success attending their efforts that cannot be matched by most dentists who have the bulk of their technical work performed by dental technicians who are permitted to have no contact with patients.

AN APPEAL TO THE MINISTER

We appeal therefore to the Minister of Health to reconsider his proposal to place denturists under the control of dentists. We further appeal to him to reconsider his decision not to meet with representatives of the Denturist Society. Consultation with all parties concerned is surely the only proper way to resolve the growing conflict.

In lieu of such consultation, are we to conclude that the Minister is of the opinion that the wishes of thousands of Ontarians should not be considered? Is the public interest held to be of secondary importance to the vested interests of the dental profession? Should not the public have full opportunity to have their say as to who will provide the services they require?

Another question which has not been answered to the satisfaction of anyone is: What is to happen to the many denturists who took such enormous risks in their defiance of the dental establishment? Is their reward to be closure of their places of business and consequent denial of services to the many people who found the services of denturists worthwhile?

We are told that "denturists will be given an opportunity to qualify under the new Act." THIS IS A MEANINGLESS CONCESSION! If dentists are granted control over the new dental health worker, they will decide who they will employ. Will any dentist even consider hiring a former denturist? Indeed, would any denturist willingly place himself again under the control of dentists?

UNFAIR LEGISLATION

The proposed legislation is so obviously unfair, both to the public and to denturists, that it should be withdrawn immediately in order that a whole new approach may be taken by government — an approach free of bias and one which will assure fair and equal opportunities to all.

We appeal therefore to the public to support denturists in our efforts to resist the passage of legislation which will benefit no one. We urge you to write or phone your Member of the Provincial Parliament calling for withdrawal of Bill 246 which will effectively eliminate denturists.

If you require the name and address of your Member of the Provincial Parliament please feel free to phone or write:

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