

The Flight from Responsibility

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In late years we have heard a great deal about “mental health,” but not nearly enough has been said about our greatest psychic disturbance—the flight from responsibility. This aberration of the intellect has spread like an infectious plague (apparently it is catching) over our entire land, attacking people in every phase of society, young and old alike. Tranquilizers are the symbol of the era.

Flight from responsibility is manifest in all the multiple facets of our lives—in families, in clubs, in trade associations, in professional associations, in churches, in every level of government.

In few families are children taught the basic historic and philosophic background of their American heritage; the rights and responsibilities of individuals; the positive, personal reactions incumbent on a potential child of God. More than likely these matters are left to the school and to the church, with no investigation and hence no knowledge as to how good a job is being done there. Should investigation reveal inadequate or even false teaching in either agency, not much is likely to be said in criticism of the professionals lest we be called an enemy of the schools, a square, a moss-back, a reactionary.

In all our activities we leave active participation, leadership and chores to the few. If things turn out to our liking, we smile and act as if we were entitled to a share of the credit. If things go not to our liking, we gripe and grouse, do nothing [and] lay all blame on the leaders who may have had leadership thrust upon them or may have seized it by the forelock....

In no facet of our lives is the flight from responsibility more evident than in the activities dealing with government at all levels. Here we see this pathological condition shriveling the soul, dimming the vision, sapping the strength, undermining the will, warping the judgment until those born the inheritors through the Grace of God of a matchless heritage from our founding fathers seem content to waive their rights as inheritors and become placid bondsmen of those who profess to have more sense and who out of compassion will condescend to supply all our needs as they see them.

Dictators large and small appear upon the scene—many of good intent, but dictators nonetheless. If anything, I am more leery of those of burning good intent. If the people can be persuaded to accept proposals voluntarily, fine; but failing in persuasion, they do not hesitate to use ruthless compulsion....

[The 5 Percent Socialists]

How do you recognize a socialist? Will he admit to the label? Not very often! Socialists do hate to be called socialists, and many of them do not believe that they are! I am reminded of a remark

to me by Mr. Dick West, the distinguished conservative editorial writer and radio commentator. He said; “Doctor, I believe we can handle the 100% out-and-out socialists. If we are defeated it will be because of the damned 5 percent socialists.”

He was referring to—and I am thinking of those who for prestige, votes, or financial gain will back one or more pet socialistic Ideas—but at the same time avoid others. Among those of whom I am thinking are: city officials who proclaim their conservatism, but ask for federal handouts to municipal governments; school board members who run on conservative tickets, but vote for lunch room aid; city officials who yell for federal aid when the storm winds blow down buildings or a river overflows; state officials who yell for federal subsidy when it doesn't rain enough; business men who squawk about taxes and federal interference, but see in federalized urban renewal a chance for the quick buck; school teachers and other public employees who talk about local self government, but failing to sell the local unit of government on an item of expense, take it to the state level (and failing there, to the national level)—seeking to put the matter over regardless of the cost in both freedom and money; supposedly states'-rights congressmen who barter those rights away for federal give-aways because they are afraid to vote against Santa Claus; doctors who are opposed to Medicare on principle, but can't resist the money; all those who take give-aways “because I am helping to pay for it and others are getting it.” Whether they realize it or not, these 5% socialists by their flight from responsibility hasten the day of 100% socialism....

Even those opposed to federal medicine are likely to speak glowingly of the need for an insurance program which will furnish them complete medical and hospital coverage without limitation at a price they are willing to pay—or preferably paid for by the employer as a fringe benefit upon which the employee pays no income tax. Such dreaming ignores the fact that such unlimited privileges can not be purchased for piddling premiums and the further fact that if furnished by the employer the cost must be added to the price of goods and services—feeding further the flames of inflation....

We find a number of third party agencies vying for the privilege (and the advantages in power and money) of assuming the patient's responsibilities—provided they can inveigle both the patient and the physician into acquiescing. The third party may be union, industry, insurance organization (more likely service plan Blue Cross Blue Shield than a commercial company), medical school, or government. In its efforts to convince the public, government is less likely to rely on persuasion and to resort to outright lying about freedom of choice. [It] makes an unctuous promise in the first paragraph and takes it all away in subsequent paragraphs.

Now what is the attitude of our profession? Frankly It has been in a dither about the matter for several years.

Failing to recognize that principles are not divisible, certain

physicians fleeing responsibility have advocated: federal grants for medical research; federal aid for medical education (so called "brick and mortar" or otherwise); federal grants for hospital construction; federal guarantee of loans for construction of offices, clinics, nursing homes; inclusion of physicians under compulsory Social Security. Such a situation has led Senator James E. Murray to state that he found it "wryly amusing" to find such physicians opposed to the nationalization of medical care for all. Whenever Senator Murray is "wryly amused" by physicians, I squirm. This old millionaire socialist has never been accused of being inconsistent. In passing I call your attention to a statement by Senator Murray in the Congressional Record last year that while he found the stands of the Association of American Physicians and Surgeons unacceptable, he would concede that those stands are always consistent....

As we have struggled with the tide of socialism we have been confronted with measures [promoted] for "the general welfare." Later similar measures carried "defense" labels. Now we are offered socialism as a weapon against "socialized medicine"! Names change to suit the moment, but the structure remains unchanged....

[Restoring Responsibility]

In our efforts to stem the flight from responsibility there are various avenues of endeavor open to us....

The first and most important of these is Non-Participation. Under a system of free choice and private practice, we have achieved quality medical care in this country that defies worldwide comparison.... The honorable method for ethical physicians to save the system is a simple one; it is the ethical and morally responsible plan of Non-Participation—a plan that is devoid of legalistic entanglements. It means that ethical physicians voluntarily agree with each other (no medical society action

is required) not to participate in schemes of bad medical care which are contrary to the public interest. It signifies that ethical physicians propose to exercise the same privilege and right they exercise in refusing to work or associate with quacks and cultists. Contrary to the shallow claims of some, it does NOT mean a "strike against the patient." It does mean that ethical physicians will NEVER withdraw their services from their rightful employers, their patients, but will refuse to become the medical slaves of a would-be usurper of the rights of both patients and physicians, be that usurper government, union, industry, insurance plan, or what have you! To do otherwise would be recreant to the welfare of the patient. Despite the simplicity of the plan it is not an easy one to follow because of the pressures encountered, chiefly financial pressure and the lack of understanding. Those of you who invoked this plan in regard to Medicare can testify to this—but have you ever tried anything that gave you more satisfaction and peace of mind?....

Little I have said today is new to most of you members of the Association of American Physicians and Surgeons. I know of no group less subject to the clinical manifestations of the flight from responsibility. Several years ago the gallant Mary Dawson Cain did this group the honor to include them among those whom she calls "Keepers of the Flame"....

I know of no better way to close than to quote to you the last lines of Mrs. Cain's last poetic message "To the Keepers of the Flame":

"God renew your strength
And give you courage too.
Have you ever thought, dear friend,
ALL THE FREEDOM IN THIS WORLD DEPENDS ON YOU!"

Mal Rumph, M.D., of Fort Worth Texas, was president of AAPS in 1959.

WILL YOUR GRANDCHILDREN BE ABLE TO SEE A PRIVATE PHYSICIAN?

The answer to that question probably depends on this one:

Will AAPS, the voice for private physicians, remain strong?

AAPS has defended private medicine for 75 years—since 1943.
AAPS relies on the generosity of its members to survive and thrive.
Please remember AAPS in your will or charitable annuity.

This is your opportunity to send a Final Message in support of freedom and private medicine.
Every gift helps, no matter how small.

For information on making a bequest, call or write:

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