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Reply to Health Minister Martin

WHEN our editorial yesterday on the pending strike at the Prince Rupert General hospital mentioned the "Bennett government's inability to cope with reality" we did not expect to have proof so soon. Health Minister Martin's letter immediately to the right on this page provides it. Unless the hospital board receives another letter within the next 24 hours, we can take it that the health minister's reply to the hospital board's telephone calls and telegrams is contained in a letter to this newspaper, dealing with an editorial of February 10 with a copy sent to the hospital board chairman.

Mr. Martin's bid to chastise The Daily News fails miserably so far as we are concerned and the copy sent to the hospital board chairman is merely cavalier treatment of the type we have come to expect.

It strikes us that the health minister's hair-splitting letter is a deliberate attempt to undermine the public's confidence in the management of the hospital.

Certainly Mr. Martin's comparison between wage scales in 1948 and those in 1958 is not news. Not to most working people. A senior reporter's wage under guild contract in 1948 was approximately $56 per week. In Vancouver last year it was $111 per week. Printers wages 10 years ago were half of the $2.69 per hour that they were in 1958. The same applies to practically every worker's wage in British Columbia. At the same time cabinet ministers should know that the provincial budget is three times as large if not more than it was in 1948. The city of Prince Rupert budget last year was $1,471,001. In 1948 it was $261,998. Certainly services have gone up and costs have increased.

For that reason gross expenditures of the Prince Rupert General hospital have also gone up. In an effort to improve services and to obtain accreditation, with BCHIS blessing, the hospital board embarked on a renovation program which included, since 1953, a new x-ray machine, a new laboratory, radiologist service, a new boiler room, new maternity ward, increased bed space, (boosting the number of beds from 90 to 107), medical records library. All of this was approved by Victoria. Much of it has meant increased staff.

Except for last year, all wage increases granted at the hospital to unionized personnel came as a result of arbitration which is binding to both parties. Last year the board negotiated and settled for a 5 per cent wage increase to the unions, a far lower percentage increase than the prevailing industrial wage boosts throughout the district.

Twice in the last five years the hospital board has invited BCHIS consulting and inspection teams into the hospital and asked them where the board can economize, improve services at no extra cost, check for overstaffing. What suggestions were made by the BCHIS teams have been carried out.

Though the hospital is deep in debt, Mr. Martin suggests the board build a hospital laundry. He says that our editorial of February 20 was incorrect in suggesting that BCHIS arbitrarily told the board to "hold-the-line" on its 1959 budget and keep it down to the 1958 level. What BCHIS did inform the board, the health minister says, is that "it would be unwise until they know of the amount of additional funds which would be available for the current year, to increase expenditures unless prepared to cover them from other sources." To a board that's thousands of dollars in the red with no "other sources" of revenue that still sounds like "hold-the-line" to us.

As for the conciliation board's majority report, we can quite understand the majority report which stated "that no increase should be granted the engineers at this time" since the board had no money. But why was it suggested that the matter be reviewed in July when the chairman of the conciliation board and the hospital board's nominee, had no indication whatsoever that the situation would be any different in July than it was then or is now.

We grant that millions of dollars have been voted by the provincial government to meet the increased cost of hospital operation. But the people of dozens of cities in British Columbia could press their hospital board's for an explanation as to deficits and they'd get the same answer—expenditures outweight revenues.

Were we a hospital board member and if your letter, Mr. Martin, is a sample of the "full and considerable attention" to all of Prince Rupert General hospital's problems, then we'd turn the job of running the hospital over to you and BCHIS. You claim you have the answer. BCHIS should try to put it into practice. Maybe you could make hospitals a contingent liability.

At least if you took over it would lengthen the lives of a large number of hospital board members who have spent years worrying and seeking ways and means of keeping the hospital operating efficiently and at the same time trying not to reduce service because of increasing costs.

Are parents doing a 'crummy job'? ...

Warden Hugh Christie of Oakalla prison has said some harsh things about the irresponsibility of parents.

His complaint: parents do a "pretty dog-gone crummy job" of raising children and that's one reason we have so many delinquents.

Mr. Christie has hit a very sore point. We don't believe he aimed his remarks at all parents because many do accept their responsibilities. He was hitting at those who through selfishness, laziness or poor example shirk their obligation to their offspring.

At the same time, let's admit that rearing children in 1959 is not a simple task. Times have changed, people just don't live the way they used to.

Parents are caught in the whirl of the demand for highly living standards which too often place heavy emphasis on material in-stead of moral values. It's the age of bustle and boredom in which parents become too mentally and physically tired in "keeping up" to give the required attention to their children.

At one time, keeping up with the Joneses simply meant learning to play a good hand of rummy, whist or bridge, or to dance a new step. And gone are those chores which helped mold a wholesome family unit—chopping the wood, feeding the chickens, emptying the ash can.

Parents have a much greater challenge than former generations. But we agree with Mr. Christie that, despite the change of times, many of them could set a better example for their families. And who said that a little old-fashioned discipline is a bad thing?

—The Vancouver Province

Coast Water Work Company

No boredom

From the Vancouver Sun

The small towns this time. Fine. After all they're entitled to something more than back-platform whistle-stop glimpses, she's their queen, too. Vancouver will get its chance next time. Or the trip after that. And nobody, citizen or Canadian, will get bored with it all.

LETTER BOX

Health minister raps editorial, queries hospital management

The Editor,
The Daily News,

In the February 10th issue of the Prince Rupert Daily News, there appeared an editorial entitled "Government Should Bail Hospitals Out of Debt". This editorial implies that the total expenditures of the hospital should be met by the British Columbia Hospital Insurance Service regardless of whether or not the hospital is economicallly operated.

First of all, your editorial was incorrect in stating "BCHIS with its warning to the Hospital board to hold its 1959 budget down to the 1958 level is just asking for trouble all over the province." On November 6, 1958, the B.C. Hospital Insurance Service letter to the hospital asking for 1959 estimates informed the hospital that until the amount of funds available for the Hospital Insurance Service had been determined by the Legislature, the Service would not be in a position to advise the hospital as to what expenditure could be approved for 1959. This obviously does not require the hospitals to arbitrarily "hold-the-line" at the 1958 level during 1959 but did advise them that it would be unwise until they know of the amount of additional funds which would be available for the current year, to increase expenditures unless prepared to cover them from other sources.

In your editorial, you did draw attention to the fact that the Conciliation Board recommended, by a majority report, that no increases be granted at this time in the wages of the engineers, and that the whole matter be reviewed in July. As this report represents careful investigation into the whole matter, it is difficult to understand why you attack it. Surely you are aware of the substantial wage increases which have been granted to the employees of the hospital over the past ten years and which have placed them amongst the highest paid in the whole province. The following table illustrates this point.

Position	1948 wage rate	1952 wage rate	1958 wage rate
General Duty Nurse	$160 monthly	$210-$240 monthly	$283-$313 monthly
Nurse Aide	$ 97 monthly	$130-$145 monthly	$191-$211 monthly
Dietary Maid	$ 92 monthly	$125-$135 monthly	$191-$206 monthly
Shift Engineer	$178 monthly	$265 monthly	$345 monthly

It will be noted that in the maximum ranges, actual salaries and wages paid have, in this ten year period of time, gone up by 93 per cent for the engineers, 123 per cent for the Dietary Maids, 117 per cent for the Nurses Aides and by 95 per cent for the General Duty Nurses.

The people of Prince Rupert are probably not aware of the very large increases in expenditures of the Prince Rupert General Hospital over the past 10 years. The following comparisons of actual gross totals indicates this point:

Year	Patient Days	Gross Expenditures	Gross Salaries
1949	23071	$195,115	$111,429
1952	28884	161,644	231,044
1955	30469	428,765	299,936
1957	31727	515,734	349,780
1958	32563	570,961	407,419

Attention is drawn to the fact that in the six years since 1952, patient days increased by 3,679 or 12.7 per cent while gross expenditures increased by $209,317 or 59 per cent and gross salaries increased by $176,365 or 76.3 per cent.

You will be interested to know that up to the end of 1956, the hospital operated without financial difficulty, actually having a small accumulated surplus over the eight years. However, in 1957 and 1958, a combined deficit of more than $43,000 was incurred, despite the face that the per diem rate was increased from $12.45 in 1956 to $14.50 in 1958, or better than 16 per cent.

It would seem that the people of Prince Rupert should press the Hospital Board for explanations as to why the hospital should operate satisfactorily for eight years and then go so deeply into a deficit. The B.C. Hospital Insurance Service has on a number of occassions pointed out to the Hospital Board the fact that a continuation of such policies as steady and continuing staff increases; increasing cost of sending laundry to a commercial establishment as compared to hospital operated laundries; the provision of free beverages to staff and others when other comparable hospitals realize from $3,000 to $4,000 yearly from this; would result in large operating deficits.

The Provincial Government is very conscious of the need to maintain a high level of patient care and this is borne out by the very substantial increases which each year have been made in the payments to hospitals. Each year, increases totalling several millions of dollars have been voted to meet the increased cost of hospital operation. However, there is a limit to what the taxpayer can afford and it is necessary and possible to give this high level of care within reasonable and economically - justified limits.

The Prince Rupert Hospital has received full and considerable attention to all its problems, as have all other hospitals throughout British Columbia. It simply comes down to a matter of good management and administration.

Yours very truly,
ERIC MARTIN,
Minister of Health and Welfare.

Nature's remedy

From The Hamilton Spectator

Fifty years ago the English sparrow was being complained of almost as bitterly as is the starling today but the once vast and noisy flocks of these birds have dwindled to small proportions and the balance of nature has been restored. So it will be with the starlings eventually.

Heave ho!

From The Montreal Gazette

Sea-chanteys and work-songs are as old as human labor. What is so often forgotten about them, in this mechanized age, is that theye were not composed for the entertainment of the workers; their main function is to impose a rhythm on the work being done.

The clamor for aid

From The Kitchener Waterloo-Record

Hardly a day passes that doesn't see some group or organization asking for some special government assistance. This trend would be less alarming if government expenditures didn't have to be paid for eventually by the people themselves in the form of taxes.

No rush

From The Calgary Herald

Canada should not rush to accept and deal with the United States on the Columbia river. Tough bargaining and a business-like approach by General McNaughton have already paid off and it would be foolish to stop now.

All Aboard By G.E. Mortimore

The dog knows he isn't allowed to sleep on the boy's bed. So when he sees me, he dives hastily under the bed and tries to pretend he has been there all the time.

As soon as I am out of the room, he climbs back on the bed and curls up.

About 7 a.m. he awakens young John by scrabbling around and licking the boy's face. The resulting noise wakes up small brother Michael.

So two boys and a dog come padding into the bedroom where the boys' mother and father are trying to sleep. The dog whines and scratches at the bedclothes—the signal that he wants to go outside.

John takes him downstairs and lets him out. Often he just stands on the back veranda for a moment and sniffs, and not seeing or smelling any of his friends, he scratches to come back in, at once.

He is always on hand to see John off on the bus to school. On some days, he escapes from the yard at school-time, and vanishes.

But even on these days, he never fails to be back when the boy returns. He jumps and barks with pleasure, because John is his particular friend.

However, he always welcomes home every member of the household, wriggling his entire body, from nose to tail-tip.

It is hard to believe that only a short while ago he was a nervous newcomer to the house.

If the boys and I tumble around playing, he barks and pulls at us, imaging that we are really fighting with one another. He's a peacemaking dog.

A large brown female of undetermined breed calls for our dog on some mornings. She stands about a foot taller than our dog, but the difference in height doesn't stop the courtship, I'm afraid.

For a time the dog was a chronic chewer of toys, shoes and all loose objects. He was also a thief. In one week he dragged down a pork roast and a roast of beef—a pretty good score.

But he seems to have changed his ways—perhaps because he knows we are keeping a close eye on him.

I think he's a fairly knowing beast. One day when Peggy and the younger boys were coming home, he heard the telephone ringing, and as soon as the door was opened, he ran toward it, barking madly.

So Peggy told me when she answered the phone—as it happened, I was the one who was telephoning. I got her to hold the phone down to the dog's ear, and I talked to him. The dog wagged his tail and licked the telephone all over.

However, he was baffled when we induced him to bark at a rented tape recorder, then played his voice back. He still hasn't figured that one out.

CANADIAN ARTIST

George Agnew Reid, Canadian painter who died in 1947 at Toronto, at different periods did portraits, landscapes and murals.

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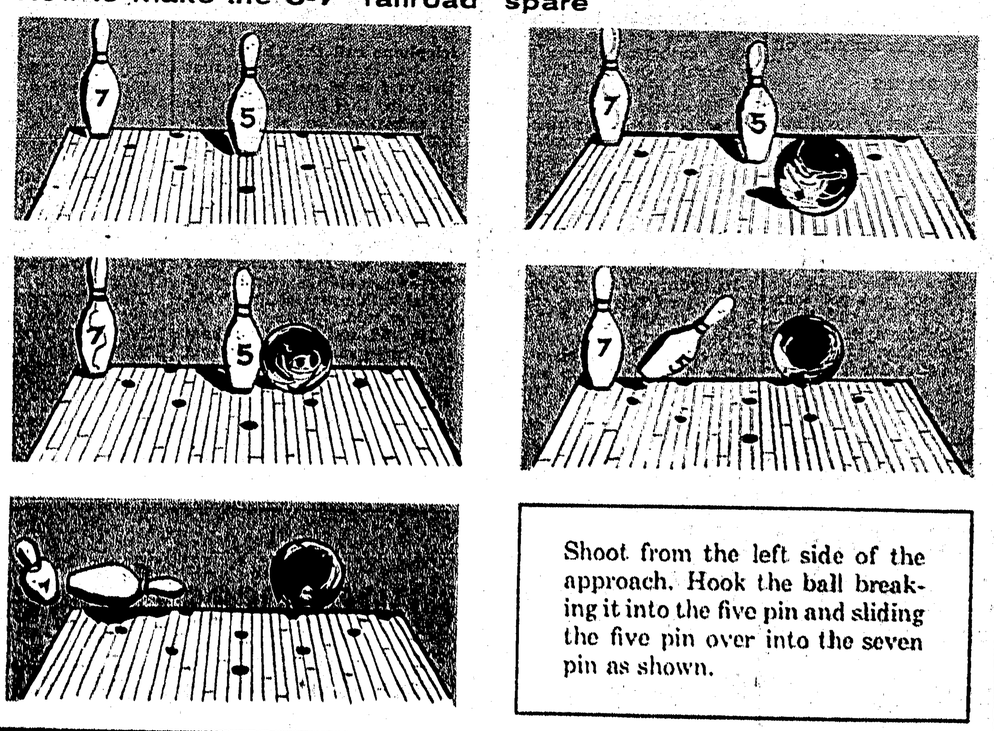

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