

A Medicare Boycott?

Die-Hard Doctors Buck AMA Plea and May Refuse to Treat Patients Under Program

By Drew Pearson

DESPITE THE official opposition of the American Medical Association, several die-hard doctors across the country are determined to boycott the new medicare program.

They will refuse to treat elderly patients who depend upon social security benefits to pay their medical bills, thus ignoring the plea of AMA president, Dr. James Appel, that a boycott would be unethical.

These militant medics have the support of their county medical societies in many areas, particularly in the South and Midwest. But the AMA stethoscope has picked up rumblings as far apart as New Jersey and California.

In effect, some county societies are threatening wild-cat strikes against the Government, which would be the first doctor strikes in United States history.

The AMA probably could stop the strikes by cutting off the membership of any doctor who participates in an anti-medicare boycott. Without AMA membership, most doctors cannot serve on the staffs of the better hospitals. This means they could not admit patients to those hospitals.

If the AMA fails to act, the Federal Government could cut off aid to hospitals and medical schools in the counties whose doctors refuse to treat medicare patients.

Softer View of Castro

BY-PRODUCT of the stiffening resentment throughout Latin America against United States armed intervention in the Dominican Republic is relaxation of the "hard line" toward Fidel

Castro's Cuba.

Though no top government officials have proclaimed any formal change in their joint policy of ostracizing the present Havana regime, there are significant signs of a softened attitude in several countries.

Cuban and Argentine embassy commercial attaches in Canada recently held exploratory conversations about a possible exchange deal involving tobacco for wheat.

Castro's ambassador to Mexico—the one Latin republic that still maintains diplomatic ties with Cuba—is finding it increasingly easy to talk to his colleagues from Central and South America when they meet at official functions or private parties.

There was a time, right after the Organization of American States voted for a collective break in relations with Havana, when most other hemisphere ambassadors would not show up at such affairs if they knew the Cuban envoy was going to be present.

As a result of these improved contacts, Castro may soon get a sizable shipment of Venezuelan crude oil for the first time in more than two years, via trans-shipment through Jamaica.

A few weeks ago, Chile sold some 7000 tons of copper wire to Czechoslovakia, with full knowledge that the Honduran-flag freighter assigned to pick it up would discharge the cargo at Havana.

Meanwhile, Mexico's ambassador to Cuba, Gen. Fernando Pamanes Escobedo, told a news conference in Havana the other day that his country is ready to step up trade with Castro. He named automated machinery as one of the Mexican imports that might be increased, in exchange for such Cuban products as tobacco, frozen seafood, hides, motion pictures and fighting cocks.

According to one knowledgeable South American diplomat stationed in Mexico City, this is partly the reason why other Latin republics

are taking a second look at their relations with Havana.

There is growing pressure in a number of Latin countries to try for a share of Cuban commerce, instead of letting Mexico have it all.

"However," said one Latin ambassador, "that's only part of the story. Our responses are always based more on emotion than on practical considerations. And in view of what's happening in Santo Domingo, there's a new wave of sympathy all over Latin America for Fidel because he defied the United States and got away with it."

New Press Secretary

ONE REASON Bill Moyers, the President's cool and confident new press secretary, has made such a hit with the press is his basic belief that reporters are entitled to non-security information.

Typical was his reaction to the New York Herald Tribune's attempt to examine the records of HARYOU-ACT, the joint city-federal agency which is supposed to be battling poverty in Harlem.

The agency is run by Harlem Congressman Adam Clayton Powell's protege, Livingston Wingate, who refused to open the payroll to Herald Tribune reporters.

He didn't want the Herald Tribune, he said, "harassing" his employes. Editor James Bellows protested to Moyers.

"We are requesting you," he wrote, "to notify Mr. Wingate immediately that his records are in the public domain and should be made available to us or any other representative of the public trust."

The Federal agencies which are cooperating with HARYOU-ACT protested privately that the Federal Government should not interfere with Adam Clayton Powell and his henchman's local administration of the program.

But the same day he received Bellow's letter, Moyers replied: "The particular program in which your reporters are interested is city-operated, although financed in part by Federal funds. Nevertheless, it would seem to me that on its face the request you have made for information is appropriate."

"I am, therefore, sending a copy of this response plus your incoming communication to the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare for his information and reaction. I am also asking Sargent Shriver (the War-on-Poverty Chief) to look into the problem.

"I am certain that the responsible Federal officials will be in touch with you on this matter very shortly."

Shriver immediately issued a directive that every Federal grant must carry a stipulation that reporters have full access to the records.

Note—Moyers sided with the Herald Tribune despite its constant criticism of his boss. President Johnson, like his predecessor, has stopped reading the H-T; but unlike President Kennedy, who canceled White House subscriptions, Mr. Johnson still subscribes to the Herald Tribune and copies are available to the staff and visitors at the White House.