

MEDICINE AND POLITICS: OUTLOOK IN '65

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The dust of the recent national election is slow to settle and still obscures many of the important and pressing issues of the campaign months. It is frustrating to realize that not one of these issues was debated satisfactorily either by Democrats or Republicans. It is hard to believe that trivialities like the nonexistent missile gap, American prestige abroad, moving the country forward and the ridiculous issue of Quemoy and Matsu were exploited successfully by the Democrats in 1960. It is harder to believe that expanding centralization and bureaucratization, flagrant corruption in government, extension of Supreme Court powers into controversial fields, racial turmoil, breakdown in law enforcement and disaster after disaster in the conduct of foreign policy could not have been exploited to advantage by the Republicans in 1964.

In their post-mortems the wise men in the communications field have found it easy to look backward and point out mistakes in the Republican campaign management. Few of these after-the-fact oracles, however, are willing to admit that the deck was stacked against Mr. Goldwater early in the game. From the time of his nomination on, he could have conducted a flawlessly brilliant campaign and still finished as the also-ran. Apart from desertion and non support by the liberal element of the Republican Party, the chief handicap under which Senator Goldwater labored was that each avenue of approach that might have been used to campaign effectively and bring the issues into focus was denied to him. Unable to force a direct confrontation in face-to-face debate on nationwide television, he was balked also by a solid phalanx of opposition forces in all influential sectors of the opinion-molding communications industry. These, for their own self-serving interests, were antagonistic to his conservative ideas and, in addition to constant harassment, made a point of presenting him to the public in the worst possible manner.

In this context the outlook facing American medicine in 1965 is a difficult one. Its plight has been well described by Dr. Irvin E. Henderson writing in the December issue of the Denver Medical Bulletin. A portion of his article is reprinted:

“Medicine in this land is at a crossroad. The recent election has placed in the hands of the Administration the power to take the nation down the long and bitter road to compulsory health care controlled by the Federal Government. The visage of such an occurrence is not an apparition. It only remains for the planners to select the route we must follow. The greatest systems of medical care the world has ever known hangs in the balance.

“While such an outlook is shocking to those who are aware of the inherent

evils and weaknesses of compulsory health care, there is an even more frightening aspect of the recent election. The total destruction of the Republican candidate for President by news media, beginning earlier than the San Francisco Convention, is a dismaying departure from the objectivity of the free press, which had been respected in earlier years. The misquotes, the quotes out of context, the editorializing in news stories, the sly ridicule in the headlines, changed the candidate's position, and most assuredly, the Republican Party's, from that of Conservative to Radical, and paradoxically, that of the Democratic President from recognized Liberal to Conservative. The strength and freedom of the Fourth Estate has been diminished, and we, too, are diminished. The danger, of course, is that if this force can be used in the political area, it can also be terrifyingly applied in other areas. It will be applied against us in the coming months in the struggle to preserve a free enterprise system of medical care.

“The immediate future is grim, and its implications are severe. At this time, it would be well for Americans to recall the words of Frank Morris: “Those of other occupations, trades and skills may stand by unconcerned while this tragedy takes place. But they should take heed from the words of the poet and preacher, John Donne. The bell that tolls the death of free medicine is also tolling the death of free religion, free justice, free press. All the excuses of the common good that apply to medicine apply in different degree to these other professions. What diminishes the freedom of my doctor, takes from me too.”

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