

Health And Freedom At Stake

FLUORIDATION OF WATER SUPPLIES

By LORD DOUGLAS OF BARLOCH, K.C.M.G.

FLUORIDATION of water supplies is a plan for adding a fluoride to the water supplied by public authorities, for the purpose of affecting the teeth of children who consume the water.

The advocates of this procedure have made varying claims that it will reduce dental decay by 50, or 60 or even 66 per cent. Others have said that at most it delays the incidence of dental decay for a short period. Still others have said that it injures the structure of the tooth so much that, if it does become affected by decay, ordinary dental treatment becomes much more difficult.

The assertion that fluoridation effects a large reduction in dental decay is based mainly upon the statistics relating to some towns in North America where this experiment has been tried. These claims have been subjected to critical analysis by Mr. P. R. N. Sutton, D.D.Sc., Senior Research Fellow in the Dental School of Melbourne University. He comes to the conclusion that "The sound basis on which the efficacy of a public health measure must be assessed is not provided by these five crucial trials." (*Fluoridation: Errors and Omissions in Experimental Trials*. Cambridge University Press.)

TOXICITY

It is well known that sodium fluoride and other fluorides used for this purpose are poisons. They are in fact used as rat poison. The advocates of this plan say that if the water contains one part per million (1 p.p.m.) of fluorine, it will protect the teeth without causing any injury to health even if imbibed over a lifetime.

The truth of this assertion is unproved. The British Government sent a mission to North America to investigate the proposal. It recommended that it be adopted in this country but it said: "While many Americans live in areas where the natural fluoride content of water is about 1 p.p.m. or more it is extremely difficult to make a comprehensive analysis of mortality statistics on the basis of previous exposure to fluorides, and no such analysis has been attempted."* It would be even more difficult to make such an analysis of morbidity statistics, if such existed.

The Health Minister of Ontario, the Hon. Dr. Dymond, in announcing that no more municipalities would be allowed to fluoridate their water supplies said that "no one knows for sure" what would be "the effect of fluoridated water if continued throughout a lifetime".

MASS MEDICATION

The advocates of this plan say that in order to affect the teeth fluorine must be imbibed during the period of

**The Fluoridation of Domestic Water Supplies in North America* (P. 13). H.M.S.O. 1953.

growth. Adult teeth are not benefited. But adding fluorides to public water supplies compels every one to take it from birth to death, although it is admitted that most of the population cannot benefit.

The amount of fluoride taken depends upon how much water each individual takes. There are enormous differences in water consumption. So that some may be receiving many times the dose administered to others. They are dosed without any individual medical examination or regard to their state of health. Such a measure of mass medication is without precedent, and contradicts all the recognised procedures of medical practice.

PERSONAL FREEDOM INVADED

Fluoridation of public water supplies is therefore an attack upon individual liberty, and a denial of all right to freedom of medical treatment. The fact that some people (whether medical officers or others) are deeply convinced that fluoridation is beneficial is no excuse. Others may come along who are equally convinced that the addition of sulphur, iron, or other elements not naturally present in the water supply is a good thing. Once the principle of mass medication is admitted, it is impossible to set any limit to it, and we are all subjected to the danger of our bodies being tampered with.

FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Those who wish to have fluorides for themselves or their children are free to do so. A jar containing enough fluoride dissolved in water to provide the advocated amount in doses of a teaspoonful a day for a whole year could be prepared for a few pence. Public health authorities could supply it to those who wished for it, and the rest would not be obliged to drink it and have it in their bath water and in all the water used for other domestic purposes. Thus freedom of choice would be safeguarded. The primary purpose of putting fluorides in the public water supplies is to prevent people from being free to accept or refuse.

FLUORIDE IS NOT A FOOD

Some of the advocates of fluoridation, recognising that mass medication is inherently immoral, try to change the ground by saying that fluoride is an essential food. There is no ground for this assertion. It is well known that many peoples in many parts of the world have had excellent teeth although their diets have contained negligible amounts of fluorine.

It is also well known, and admitted by almost all dentists and doctors that dental decay is mainly due to wrong habits of feeding, especially the consumption of large quantities of sweets and starchy foods, and lack of uncooked foods and foods which require much chewing. The rapid deterioration of the teeth of many different

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...races on changing to such "civilised diets" is well established.

The fluorides which it is proposed to add to public water supplies are different from the compounds of fluorine which are found in traces in certain foods. Sodium fluoride is a poisonous by-product of the manufacture of aluminium and of certain agricultural fertilisers.

Diets have been constructed which would provide what the advocates of fluoridation consider to be an adequate dose from natural sources. This method has been recommended by the Scientific Council of the International Society for Research on Nutrition and Vital Substances as being preferable to compulsory fluoridation of drinking water. It is unobjectionable because it is

purely voluntary.

In a number of places in the United States and elsewhere polls of the electors have been held on the question of fluoridating the water supply. In nearly every case the proposal has been defeated. In the latter part of 1959 polls were held in eight towns in New Zealand. In every case there was an overwhelming adverse vote, despite official support and the recommendations of a Committee of Inquiry. In Auckland, the largest city (population 400,000), the mayor although personally popular in other respects was defeated by the president of the Anti-fluoridation Society.

It would be well for opponents of this nostrum to point out these facts to their Member of Parliament and other representatives.

A Lesson From India

The tragic failure of an idealistic attempt to succour the poor and hungry.

Translated (1952) by the late A. W. MADSEN from the Danish Justice Party's Journal, *Vejen Frem*, and reprinted in response to many requests

THE much travelled and well known author Karl Eskelund, whose many books on foreign countries and their peoples have countless readers, has contributed to the Danish weekly journal *Hjemmet* ("The Home") a very interesting article entitled "They wanted to show that India could flourish."

Karl Eskelund describes a benevolent effort which a band of young American and English Quakers made in the way of assisting some of the Indian population, millions of whom live at starvation level.

The young idealists took up their task one spring day in 1946 when they arrived at the village district of Pifa, which lies in the Ganges delta. They were fully aware that their work would test their patience, for in India you can get no results "at five minutes past twelve." But after having outlined their plans to the peasants, the fishermen and the landowners, which met with general approval, they organised a co-operative enterprise in cultivating the land and in marketing the produce. This was formerly handled by middlemen who made something like 100 per cent. profit on the trade. They set up day schools for the children, evening schools for adults, clinics, etc.

After overcoming the initial difficulties, they saw signs of progress. Inspiration grew. Health conditions improved. All took greater interest in their work and their earnings increased. New ideas took shape—there was advance along the whole line—an advance, slow but sure.

Five years after the experiment began Karl Eskelund visited Pifa and with one of the Quakers as his guide, he went through the village to see how it was faring. The Quaker had lost more than two stones in weight and was as thin and spare as the natives. But what was worse, he had lost heart because the experiment had proved a total failure. The day school still existed, but

only one-fourth of the children attended it. The evening school was closed. The clinic was hardly used. Agriculture, fishing and trade were back again to old methods.

The author asked for an explanation of this fiasco. The young Quaker offered quite a number of reasons. They had been too inexperienced; economic conditions and the tension between India and Pakistan had handicapped the work; the climate was against them, it was too humid and hot, exhausting both energy and will.

ESKELUND could accept none of these explanations and finally he got to the root of the matter. We quote his own words:—

"In the first year after beginning the experiment, both peasants and fishermen earned more than ever before. What was the result? The large landowners at once raised their rents and the smaller landowners followed suit. The peasants had to pay more for permission to cultivate the land. The fishermen had to find more money to buy permission to cast their nets on the flooded fields. In that way practically the whole of the increased earnings passed into landowners' pockets.

"The people of Pifa were unhappy at this. Nevertheless, in the next year they worked hard. Crops were plentiful; there was a rich catch of fish; good prices were paid for the produce. At once the landowners raised their rents still higher.

"The people then began to lose courage. What was the use if for all their efforts they got no benefit? The landowners waxed fatter. The peasants and fishermen did not become any thinner—that they could not, for otherwise they would die.

"Indians are ignorant but they are not stupid. They can put two and two together. They had found them-