

THE PROGRESS OF PUBLIC HEALTH AT PRESENT

by **LLAMBI ZIÇISHTI**

In this article, the Minister of Health deals with the special care devoted by the people's regime, since the early days of its establishment, to the important problems of protecting and strengthening the health of the people. He shows, by facts and figures, that in this fields too, we have achieved excellent results, which are only an indicator and milestone of new successes in all fields of socialist construction

OVER THESE PAST THIRTY YEARS, SOCIALIST ALBANIA HAS ACHIEVED EXCELLENT RESULTS IN ALL FIELDS OF POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ACTIVITY, AND THESE BROOK NO COMPARISON WITH THE PAST.

GREAT SUCCESSES HAVE BEEN ALSO ACHIEVED IN THE FIELD OF PROTECTING AND STRENGTHENING THE HEALTH OF THE PEOPLE BECAUSE THIS CARDINAL QUESTION HAS ALWAYS HAD GREAT ATTENTION FOCUSED ON IT BY OUR PARTY OF LABOUR AND OUR GOVERNMENT.

Our socialist public health system, from its inception was built up on sound principles based on Marxist-Leninist ideology

LLAMBI ZIÇISHTI - Minister of Public Health and professor of surgery in the medical faculty of the State University of Tirana.

and the policy of the Party. Over these past thirty years Albania has collected a wealth of experience in public health, and this is a sure guarantee of further, even greater successes.

Here we shall give you an idea of the main aspects of the health service in our country.

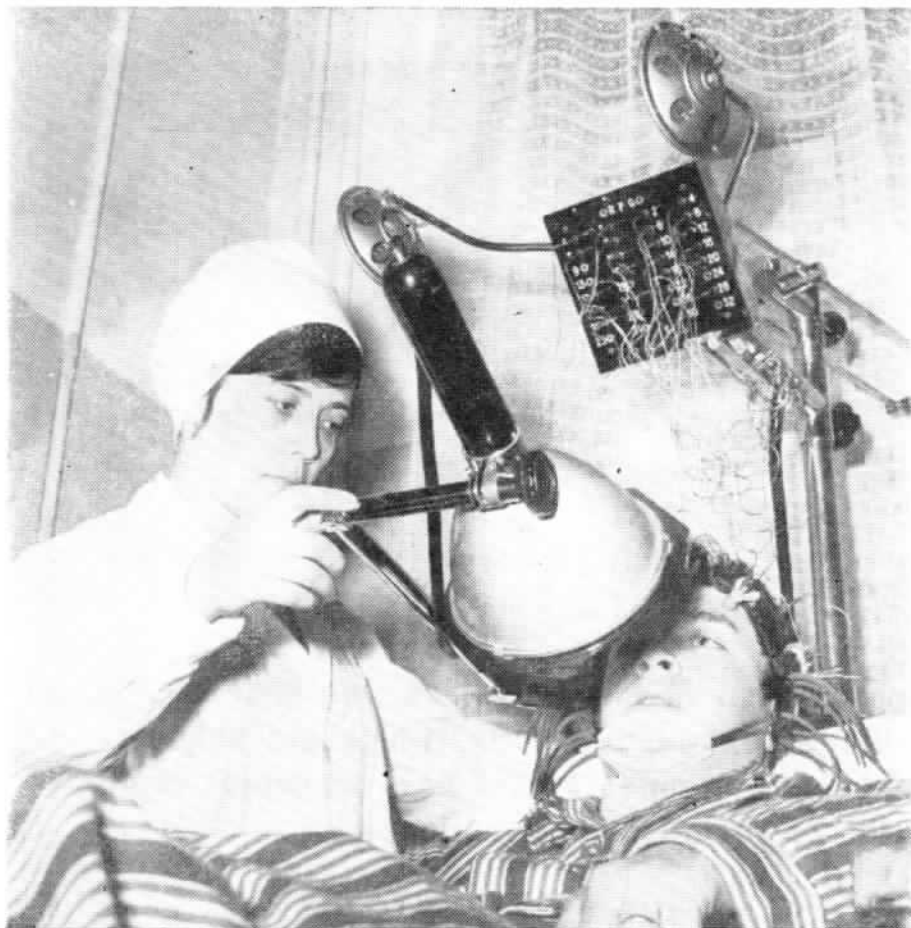
The state is fully responsible for protecting the health of the people

We can say, without any reservation, that in the field of health service our country was the most backward in Europe before liberation. At that time, we had

for public health was smaller than the amount spent by the state in the upkeep of the royal court!

Immediately after liberation this situation had to be ended. With the forming of the first people's government, a Ministry of Health was set up for the first time in our country. By this act our state undertook all responsibility for the active

on a scientific basis, such diseases as malaria, syphilis and tuberculosis, and nothing was spared to carry this struggle through to success. Large investments were made, to extend the network of all sorts of curative and preventive health institutions, the pharmaceuticals industry was set up and, in recent years, a plant for the production of electro-medical in-



In Albania all health services are rendered free of charge. The people find in health institutions a great interest

only 0.8 beds per 1,000 inhabitants, and only 1 doctor for 10,000 inhabitants; only 0.4 per cent of pregnant women gave birth with medical assistance; dental care and pharmaceuticals were completely in private hands and those few hospitals that existed in the larger cities were divided into grades, and hospitalisation was charged for. Infectious diseases, in particular, malaria, syphilis, and tuberculosis, were widespread. The total budget

and total protection of the people's health. The proper funds were made available, and medical equipment in private hands was requisitioned; a more proportional division of the existing medical forces was made, both in the cities and in the villages, and the first schools for training lower and middle medical cadres were set up.

Programmes were worked out on a national scale to combat systematically, and

struments and equipments has been built. In 1952 the higher Medical Institute opened; it later became the faculty of Medicine in the State University of Tirana.

State funds for public health have increased from year to year. Today we have a satisfactory extension of medical institutions. In 1973, there were about 8 hospital beds for every 1,000 inhabitants, and it is envisaged that by the end of the fifth five-year plan, in 1975, there

will be 10 beds for every 1000 inhabitants, a figure which is considered as optimal for an advanced health service.

Good results have also been achieved in the countryside. In every united cooperative (comprising 6-8 villages on the average) there exists a health centre, which includes a clinic run by a doctor, the mo-

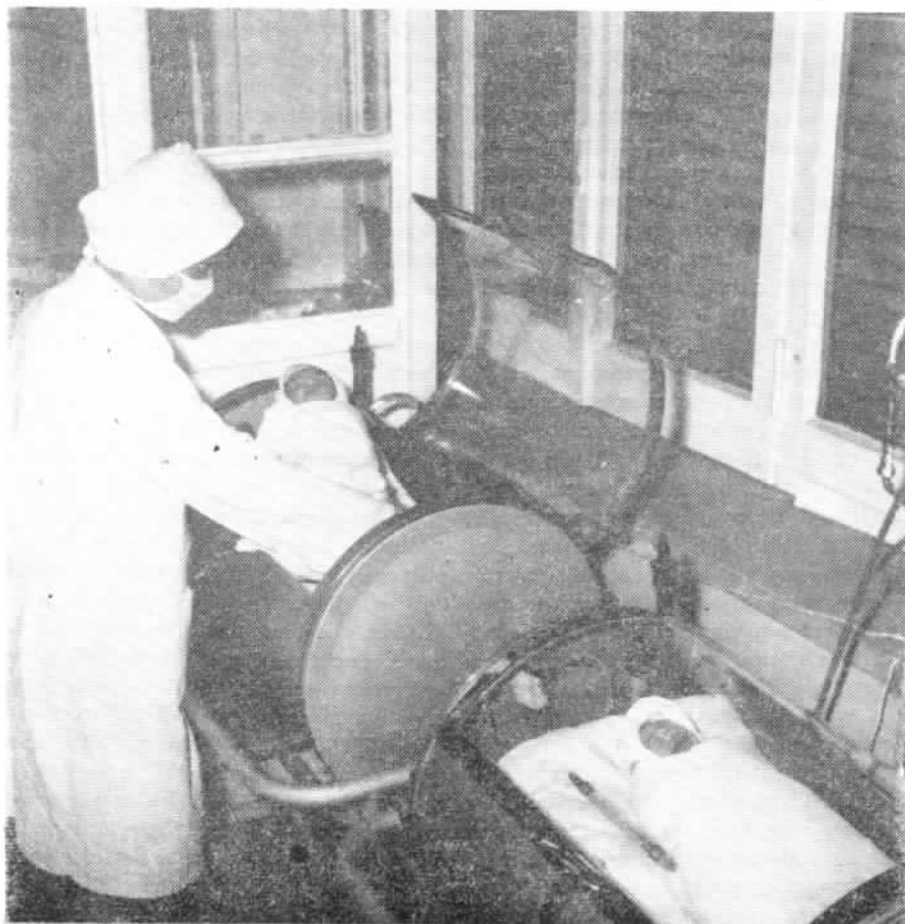
vely short period of time he will be joined by a pediatrician. The centre has also a dentist, a pharmacist or assistant-pharmacist, a midwife and other necessary personnel.

In 63 areas, relatively remote from the cities, there are small regional hospitals which include the service of pathology, pediatrics and obstetrics.

rely free. Also free are medicines for children under one year old who are examined in outpatient clinics.

As an illustration, in cases in which sick people suffering from grave long term illnesses have been treated, the state has spent as much money on them as would suffice to build a new house in which a whole family could lead a

*in the discovery and combating
of various diseases.
For this purpose
health institutions have
been equipped with apparatuses
of the most modern ones*



ther and child service at the mother and child consultation centre and in the maternity home, dental care and a pharmaceutical service.

Besides this, every village, irrespective of its size, has an outpatient clinic, a consultation centre staffed by a nurse, and a midwife, while bigger villages have two nurses each.

Every medical centre is directed by a general practitioner, and within a rela-

**Medical assistance
in our country is given
free of charge,
it is skilled
and available to everybody**

One of the greatest achievements of our people's power is the provision of free medical assistance to the whole people. Accommodation in hospitals, in sanatoria, and in maternity homes is enti-

comfortable life. Thus, in our country, a case of illness in a family is no burden at all financially, and does not affect the family budget, whereas in a capitalist country— as was the case in Albania before liberation— a sick person in the family is a real catastrophe.

Here, while the sick person is treated free of charge in hospital, thanks to the very advanced social insurance system we have in our country, the family re-

ceives a percentage of the sick person's salary, and this could be as much as 95 per cent of it. Since 1971, such insurance has been established in the agricultural cooperatives, too, in the same way as the system of old age pensions was established.

Medical assistance is becoming more qualified from year to year. Already this year we have one doctor and one dentist for about every 880 inhabitants. In the last four or five years 2.5 times more doctors have graduated annually from the faculty of medicine than the whole country had on the eve of liberation.

Now we consider the extent of the medical service to be quite satisfactory, and we are now striving to improve its quality so as to utilize our institutions to the maximum and in a more scientific way. Specialization has been progressively developed, and modern equipment has been installed which allows us to carry out laboratory, biochemical and radiological analyses on the level of the most advanced medical science; treatment is by the latest methods and preparations; and operations of the most complex kind, in heart surgery, neurosurgery, chest surgery, etc., are being done.

One important task, at the present stage of Albanian medicine, is strengthening and expanding local medical assistance, in both towns and villages and also, to make this assistance most effective, strengthening and expanding clinical and biological laboratories, and radiology, physiotherapy and other services, so as to come to the assistance of the people as quickly as possible.

High priority is given in Albania to the medical service for mother and child. With the energetic measures that have been taken in this direction, especially with the provision of one midwife for every village, all women now give birth with medical assistance, and most births take place in maternity homes. The network of pediatric hospitals and wards, as well as of children's clinics has greatly extended.

Thanks to the planned territorial extension of health institutions, medical assistance is now able to reach everybody. Consulting and outpatient clinics have been set up as near as possible to the people. There is a special medical service in work centres, so that medical aid is close to the worker. The same exists in school hostels, at the big industrial projects under construction, etc.

Our socialist public health is based on the principle of preventive medicine

On the basis of the correct understanding and application of preventive medicine, we have achieved good results in combating those diseases which had a markedly social character, particularly in the first decade after liberation, as well as in the prevention of other infectious diseases. This is now a country where for years there has been not one case of malaria (although Albania was the most malaria-stricken country in Europe before liberation, with almost half of its population affected by this disease). From 1949 on, there have been no cases of syphilis here. Fewer cases of tuberculosis are being found every year, so that measures are now being taken to make substantial reductions in the number of TB beds. In 1951, for every 100,000 inhabitants, 296 new cases of tuberculosis were found, but by 1972 for the same number of inhabitants, only 86 new cases were found.

These results were achieved by strengthening preventive measures in particular.

The principle of preventive medicine is put into practice by means of a whole system of specialized institutions for this purpose, such as epidemiological health centres, dispensaries and women's and children's consultation centres. Besides these specialized institutions, all other institutions are obliged to devote great attention to prophylaxis in their work.

In 1971 the 11th Plenum of the Central Committee of the PLA convened to analyse the medical service in our country, especially the prophylactic service and hygiene. At this Plenum it was pointed out that prophylaxis must always set the tone to the whole of our public health service and that a deep revolutionisation of medical thinking in our country should be made for the allround application of the principle of prophylaxis. Our medical service does not deal only with the sick; it deals also with the healthy, in order to protect them against disease and has its say in making environmental conditions, working and living conditions, as favourable as possible, on the most scientific basis. Great attention is also devoted to these problems by the scientific research institutions, such as those of hygiene, epidemiology and pediatric research, those fighting tuberculosis, etc.

Satisfactory results have been achieved in the reduction of cases of infectious diseases. While before liberation these diseases were the prime cause of death, today they have fallen to sixth place. Energetic measures are taken for regular vaccinations, to increase local production of vaccines, to improve quarantine and disinfection measures, etc. In these last four years, our country twice faced the danger of the introduction of cholera and smallpox, which appeared in neighbouring countries. But due to the measures taken by our health organs, actively and unreservedly aided by the entire people, this danger was averted.

In order to strengthen prophylaxis, we have a strong code of laws on sanitation on the basis of which good discipline is ensured in the observation of hygiene and sanitary regulations by administrations, individuals, etc. We have a State Sanitary Inspectorate which continually oversees the observance of these regulations. Recently the Inspectorate for the protection of the environment against pollution was also set up; it deals mainly with the problem of work centres, plants, combines, etc., maintaining clean air, land and water. As our country is in a stage of vigorous industrialization, the adoption of measures to protect the environment, right from the building of industrial establishments and providing for and insisting on the inclusion of the proper cleaning installations, will ensure good work environments for the workers, and will avert the dangers of damage to the fauna and flora of our country.

The working masses themselves take an active part in protecting their health

Our people have good traditions concerning the protection of their health, which they consider to be a major source of national wealth. These good traditions have been further developed under our people's power.

Prophylaxis always presupposes good sanitary habits and education, and it cannot be thought of without these. Therefore, the public health workers have been entrusted with the permanent task of tirelessly spreading knowledge of basic hygiene among the people. We have had much success in this direction.

The way of life in our country today brooks no comparison with the past, particularly in the countryside. The general rise in the economic level, the increased family incomes, the raised level of education and culture in general, and of sanitation in particular, have all influenced the way of life, how a case of illness in the family is dealt with, etc. The arrival of electricity in every village of our Republic, the new dwelling houses built everywhere, and the dense network of socio-cultural institutions, such as public baths, laundries, bakehouses, restaurants, crèches and kindergartens, etc., which have been set up, have resulted in peasant life being brought closer to that in town.

All the great undertakings for the eradication of malaria and syphilis and the improvement of hygiene in the country, have had the unlimited backing of the broad masses of the people. The slogan launched by Lenin in his time, «the protection of health is the work of the masses themselves» has long since become a reality in our country, and this mass line is deepening from year to year.

The mass organisations, the Democratic Front of Albania, the Trade Unions of Albania, the Albanian Women's Union and the Albanian Labour Youth Union, have always dealt with the question of protecting health. In collaboration with the health organs, they continually organise mass clean-up campaigns, they give active help, for example, by ensuring that every village has a clean, plentiful water supply, they take part in demography commissions and closely follow the statistics of births and deaths, especially of infants, they help work in the health institutions, they organize courses in hygiene for mothers, and hygiene activists, they supervise the work during partial or total mass vaccinations, etc.

In view of the continual raising of the hygiene education of the people, our country has a network of institutions which organize hygiene education among the masses. Every district has its hygiene education centre; these are directed by a central administration of hygiene education, which is under the Ministry of Public Health. Pamphlets about hygiene for the people are given mass circulation every year and posters, papers, exhibitions, films etc., are distributed far and wide throughout the country. Much is being done by means of radio and television, and their medical programmes

are followed with great interest by the people. Our entire press, central and provincial, daily and periodical, pay special attention to spreading knowledge of hygiene among the people. The monthly review «Shëndeti» («Health») is also published in Tirana for the broad masses of the working people.

Our public health develops on advanced scientific grounds and on the basis of Marxist-Leninist philosophy

From year to year, Albanian medical science has amassed quite a broad experience which is materialized in thousands of articles published in reviews and special books and papers given at scientific sessions and symposia. Our doctors keep in touch with the new achievements of world medical science, put new diagnostic and treatment methods into practice, and improve laboratory methods. In general, through their scientific studies, they strive to solve the specific problems facing medical practice here in Albania.

The Faculty of Medicine at the State University of Tirana is presently attended by 2,500 students (general medicine, dentistry and pharmacy). The faculty staff have now acquired plenty of experience, and almost all the text books are written by them.

Great attention is paid here to the specialization of the cadres, and to post-graduate qualifications. At our clinics and medical research institutions, the cadres regularly spend periods of 3-4 years, and 2-3 months in qualification courses.

Scientific work is not a monopoly of the central teaching and study institutions, but is also carried out in other district health institutions. Besides work of a regional character, studies of a broader national character are also carried out. During the 1971-1975 five-year plan, studies are continuing on the extent of hypertension in our country, the fight against dystrophy and rickets, and on some occupational diseases. Analyses are also being made from the experience amassed in our country in the field of epidemiology and immunology with regard to some infections and epidemic diseases, such as measles, influenza, etc.

In order to keep the doctors well informed of world medical science, we have a good supply of the most diverse books

and reviews, in both central and district libraries, in addition to those at the most important health institutions. Besides this, doctors are sent abroad every year to specialize in new branches or to become further qualified in the existing branches. On their return home, these people strive to put into practice what they have learned and at the same time to teach their colleagues.

In their studies our doctors base themselves in the first place on the dialectical materialist world outlook which underlies our Marxist-Leninist philosophy. They always bear in mind the teachings of our party and its important documents concerning the health of the people. Comrade Enver Hoxha, on many occasions, has discussed many problems with regard to the protection of health, and has indicated the course Albanian medicine must follow in order to serve our people in the best way.

*
* * *

As a result of the allround progress made by our country over the 30th years of people's power, and as a consequence of the progress of the health service, we have now reached demographic indices of the physical development of the population, morbidity, etc., which are satisfactory. Suffice it to mention that within the state boundaries of our Republic in 1944 there were about 1 million inhabitants; today there are about 2,270,000 inhabitants. Thus, we have had, during these past 30 years, a high average birth rate. As well, we have a relatively low death rate, about 8 for every 1000 inhabitants. Our country has the highest natural population increase in Europe. Moreover the physical development of our population is improving every year. A healthy and optimistic younger generation is growing up in our country.

There has also been a rise in the average life expectancy of our people. In 1938 this was about 38 years, but by 1970 it was about 69 years.

Irrespective of the fact that the successes achieved so far in protecting the health of our people are very evident and convincing, providing further proof of the incontestable superiority of the socialist socio-economic order which has triumphed in our country, we consider also these successes to be only milestones in advancing the happiness and welfare of our working people.