

THE RIGHT TO HEALTH (Originally published March 1967)

Since the passage of the Medicare bill, the subject of health seems to occupy increasing space in the nation's news. The communications media, always aware of Western man's hypochondriacal tendencies have augmented his interest constantly by giving undue prominence to news stories relating to sickness and health. As our government becomes increasingly involved in the expanding practices of socialism and welfarism, its concern about health grows disproportionately greater. The concern mounts directly as politicians realize that here is an issue, which ranks next to motherhood and religion in safe, vote-gathering appeal. As they extend health benefits to more and more, politicians have begun to talk glibly of a person's "right to health."

Nearly everyone (except perhaps those few who seek a convenient disability retirement) wants to be healthy. To the welfare-minded politician, everyone not only should be healthy but also has the right to *expect* to be healthy. But health, like wealth, is a relative commodity, indefinable except in the general terms of being sound in mind, body and soul. Disregarding the generalities of mind and soul, physical health implies freedom from physical disease or pain.

It is a paradox that a nation as healthy and well cared for medically as our own should be made to agonize over its health because of political opportunism. Through intelligent and widespread public health measures and the steady advances and application of medical knowledge and techniques available at all levels of society, the citizen of the United States enjoys good health to a degree unsurpassed in any of the world's civilized nations. It should be remembered, however, that the citizen's general health is only a fortunate byproduct of our American society and the living environment created by the society. His individual health will always remain primarily a responsibility of his own, resting almost entirely on his own effort to maintain it.

The perversion of political thinking that labels health a "right" of the citizen and implies that it can be demanded (with the further implication that it soon may be demanded at no cost except to taxpayers) disregards the elusive nature of health. Such political sophism could as well demand every citizen's right to food and water and his right to clothing and shelter and other basic necessities, from which all health derives.