

The projected Blood Bank

By "DOCTOR"

The letter by Dr. Philip Muscat, M.D., M.P. (January 27) should not be allowed to pass unnoted because it raises questions of national importance. Dr. Muscat deplores the fact that up to now a proper service of blood transfusion has not been provided in Malta, but at the same time he does not give credit to those Organizations that have been trying to satisfy this pressing need in our Islands.

Voluntary initiative by private bodies and organizations has been responsible for much good work in the Health Services of our Islands. It pioneered such important services, as the Child Health Clinics which were started by the PTA in 1918 after the First World War, and the Maternity service, the Ante-Natal clinic, the Malta Memorial District Nursing Association, all of which originated as voluntary endeavours after the Second World War.

Indeed voluntary associations, owing to the enthusiasm of the members, for their respective cause, very often achieve better results than bureaucratic bodies. Voluntary endeavour engenders public spirit, so lacking in our Island where the general trend is to expect everything from the Government and to depend solely on the Government for initiative.

In other countries voluntary organizations are not only encouraged but they are often subsidized by the Government. In Great Britain in particular, some of

the greatest national institutions, like the British Museum, the National Gallery, the Universities, many of the greatest hospitals, started as voluntary and private institutions, and still are; and the nation wants them to be autonomous and free from Government control.

In our own Island itself, what part of the national heritage are such private institutions? (In many cases Church and religious foundations) as the Rose Sister's Hospital, St. Catherine's Hospital, the Church Orphanages, more than 30 in number, the Church Schools (not least St. Michael's and Mater Admirabilis Colleges) etc? Shall all these be scrapped because the care of the sick, of the aged, of orphans and because of education, are certainly duties incumbent on any Government?

CONCERNED

Dr. Muscat seems to be concerned about wastage resulting from abundant supply of blood. He may rest assured that such a contingency will never happen. As matters stand, there is never enough blood to satisfy the ever increasing needs of patients; in fact, we often read of fatalities resulting from lack of blood supplies.

Experience both here and abroad has proved that every drop of blood is fully utilized and the need for blood is progressively increasing because nowadays blood is not only used for transfusion, but also

for therapeutic purposes. According to a statement published recently, the blood collected by the Sovereign Order will be supplied free of charge to all patients who might be in need of it and to all hospitals in Malta and Gozo, both Government, and private.

Dr. Muscat fears that in collecting their blood supplies the Health Department and other private organizations might overlap, and that there might not be enough donors to supply both Banks. This is not likely to happen. We are all aware that there are many

individuals who are reluctant to make an offer to Government, but they are very generous towards private and voluntary Organizations doing philanthropic work.

The Order has come forward to provide a sorely needed service to our people. It took its decision as far back as 1954, and during that year it coined a Gold Medal with the set purpose of collecting funds for the projected Blood Bank. The fruits of the labour of these four years are now maturing. Let us not discourage it, but let us show our appreciation and let us express our hope and belief, that other voluntary organizations undertake to provide assistance, help and benefits to our people.

The Blood Bank service

BY BLOOD DONOR

One of the good results of the 1939/45 War is the progress that has been made in connexion with Blood Transfusions, and many Service men and women as well as civilians owe their lives to the system in its various forms.

It is due to the lethargy and the false sense of security of the Medical Profession and the various Ministers of Health since 1947 in Malta when the Island was granted those millions for its material and moral reconstruction, that no Blood Bank is available in Malta. By "moral" I mean the means of well being; better hospitals, better equipment, better medicines, better social services . . . as a layman then I could not speak.

IN CONTACT

Since that time I have been in correspondence with Blood Donors' Associations and have read about Blood Transfusions and the various methods used abroad and I have been surprised how in Malta, a few appeals on the local Rediffusion system bring persons of both sexes and of all ages and of all ranks rushing to St. Luke's . . . I repeat rush, many in their own cars or trucks, others on foot . . .

Now that the Blood Bank system seems about to arrive in Malta, let it be at St. Luke's as the rush will no longer be required. But before this a few Doctors and Nurses should be sent abroad to learn this delicate Branch of Science.

Let the donors be voluntary, let their names be entered in

a confidential Register where-in their respective Blood Group is inserted along with other personal data. They could then be contacted as required. Blood Donors will come and others will join them.

I hope that all donors will be glad to read the following few words from the Prayer composed by Pope John XXIII for them:— " . . . The anguish of those who suffer, You brothers and ours, urge us to give a little of our blood so that the vigour of health may return but we would that this gift be directed to You Who did shed Your Precious Blood for us . . ."