INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION

JOINT I.L.O./W.H.O. COMMITTEE ON INDUSTRIAL HYGIENE

1st Meeting, Geneva,
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Fourth Item on the Agenda

PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION OF THE POSSIBILITIES OF
JOINT I.L.O./W.H.O. ACTION IN THE FIELD OF
CO-OPERATION BETWEEN INDUSTRIAL MEDICAL
AND PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES

Comments by Dr. Leonard Greenburg.
Two of the most important characteristics of public health are: (1) - the prevention of disease as contrasted with curative medicine; (2) - the mass attack, that is, the application of preventive techniques to large bodies of people, as contrasted with the individual.

In every country of the world, there are well known examples of the public health programme. In some countries, of course, such programmes have received greater emphasis than in others. Nevertheless, in all countries of the world, one can find successful examples of the public health campaign. Such for example, as the purification of water supplies; the disposal of sewage; the control of insect vectors of disease and the immunisation of large portions of the population.

Invariably, this type of activity is conducted by a Department or some similar Division of the State or Federal Government, usually designated as the Health Department or Public Health Department or its equivalent.

On the broader world basis, the W.H.O. has come into being as a mechanism for rendering assistance in the field of public health to those countries requiring such technical assistance and requesting the W.H.O. for it.

Industrial Medical Services

Industrial medical services have, as their objective, the medical care of employees becoming ill or injured while at work; the diagnosis of diseases occupational in origin; the physical examination of employees; the promotion of health and the medical aspects of the administration of Workmen's Compensation, etc. The Industrial Medical Service is also required to assist, insofar as possible, in the prevention of occupational disease and of accidents.

Industrial medical services originally developed as a response to the need for the treatment of occupational injuries; on the governmental level, as a form of assistance to factory inspectors in the prevention of disease and injuries.

The inspection of factories in practically all countries of the world is conducted by labour departments in some type of a Factory Inspectorate Division. These Factory Inspectorates require the assistance of Divisions of Industrial Hygiene for the determination of toxic materials in the atmosphere and estimation and control. By these means, the occupational diseases are prevented.
Possibility of Joint Action

Because of the fact that the factory represents an aggregate of many persons employed in one or more closely allied buildings, the factory presents an avenue of mass approach. It is apparent that here is a field for the I.L.O., in the control of accidents and the occupational diseases and for the W.H.O. in the control, for example, of the communicable diseases, utilising such techniques as mass inoculation; the mass detection of diseases, such as mass x-ray studies; mass blood studies for venereal diseases, nutrition, mental hygiene, laboratory services and public health education, etc.

It is the opinion of the writer as a result of this preliminary examination that there exists in the factory a wide field for co-operation between the W.H.O. and I.L.O. in the fostering of public health and industrial health.

How can this Field of Action be Developed

The W.H.O. and the I.L.O. must both be convinced that the best interests of working populations will be served by the joint approach to the health problems outlined above. The W.H.O. and I.L.O., if they desire to utilise this area of approach must be prepared to advise the appropriate ministries (health and labour) of their views. The preparation of specific detailed information showing the local authorities (health and labour) how to co-operate in the industrial establishment, must be developed. The latter must take into account the variations in the governmental administrative procedure and technique in the specific country in which the programme is being developed. Finally, a broad programme of health education, both on the industrial side and the public health side must accompany the effort in a given country of attack. The I.L.O. and W.H.O. may well co-operate in the preparation of such educational material for the use of the area under development.

It is the belief of the writer that both services, W.H.O. and I.L.O., will find themselves strengthened by this joint action in this field.