

**ISTITUTO ITALIANO D' IGIENE
PREVIDENZA ED ASSISTENZA SOCIALE**
Organo Nazionale di Documentazione, Propaganda e Coordinazione
Sotto l'Alto Patronato di S. M. il RE
E SOTTO GLI AUSPICI DELLA
CASSA NAZIONALE PER LE ASSICURAZIONI SOCIALI
ROMA (1) - Palazzo Sciarra - Via Minghetti, 17 - Roma

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General Director Member of the Superior Council
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**Central International Committee for the
Coordination of the International Federa-
tions of preventive medicine and social relief**

**ISTITUTO ITALIANO
D' IGIENE, PREVIDENZA ED ASSISTENZA SOCIALE**
Palazzo Sciarra - Via Minghetti, 17 - Roma (1)

The following memorial, addressed to the Director General of the League of Red Cross Societies, was officially presented to the Council General of the League, at its third meeting of Paris, 28th of April 2nd of May 1924, by H. E. Senator Ciruolo, President of the Italian Red Cross, and unanimously accepted by the Council. The following resolution was adopted:

Commission I. Resolution III (extract).

The Council General approves the policy of the League, which is in close contact with the League of Nations, the International Bureau of Labour, the International Bureau of Public Hygiene and the International Unions which serve the ends of hygiene, at the same time stimulating the formation of such Unions in districts where they do not already exist, as necessity arises.

The Council General recommends to the Secretariate the project of Prof. Ettore Levi, which proposes the formation of a Central International Council of the Societies occupied with the work of hygiene in which a representative of the League shall cooperate with delegates of the above-mentioned Societies, provided that such Societies shall have already formed close relations with the official organizations above-mentioned.

To Sir Claude Hill,
Director General of the League of Red Cross Societies.

Sir,

At the fifth anniversary of the founding of the League of the Red Cross Societies, whose activity in the past has given to Europe a new understanding of preventive medicine and social relief, and whose work in the future holds yet greater promise, I venture to address myself to you as its representative. In April, 1920, H. E. Senator Ciruolo presented officially to your predecessor, Sir David Henderson, an open letter (1) in which I brought before the League certain practical suggestions for its cooperation with other national and international organizations of a like character. These suggestions were chiefly concerned with the wider circulation of the Library of the League, with the standardization of propaganda and with a comparative study of the new Health-State Organizations of different Nations after the war problems which I still believe to demand consideration. Since the publication of this open letter the relations between the League of Red Cross Societies and the Institute which I represent have so developed that I address myself to you with the greater confidence, and ask your attention to a further proposal, namely: the constitution of a *Central International Committee for the Coordination of*

(1) The following translation is a résumé of the Italian text officially communicated to the League and published in *Difesa Sociale*, 5 Magi 1924.

(1) « Bulletin of the League », September 1921, n. 12, pg. 472.

the International Federations of preventive medicine and social relief.

Such a Committee would, I believe, serve a useful purpose, for the following reasons:

1. The problems studied by the League of Red Cross Societies are international problems.
2. International cooperation is today perhaps only possible in the field of hygiene and social work.
3. Cooperation, if found practicable in such activities, might point the way to a more general international understanding and collaboration.

In the cause of human betterment and in the campaign against preventable disease and social inequality, national egoism is indefensible, both immoral and un-economic: these causes are super-national and should bind together men of goodwill of every nation.

During the second-half of the 19th century, and in the opening years of the present century, side by side with a general social and economic progress, the great cooperative societies, syndicates, trade unions, and corporations charged with the protection and development of labour and of capital, developed with enormous rapidity. Labour and capital alike understood the necessity of organizing in homogeneous groups, for the safeguarding and advancement of their moral and economic interests. Yet the work for social betterment has lacked a corresponding unity of effort and is still regarded as the special province of the scientist or the philanthropist. But it is obvious and inevitable that, in the future, education, hygiene, preventive medicine and social relief must be organized as the forces of capital and labour have been organized, for the evolu-

tion of a better standard of living and for the wider physical, mental and moral opportunity of every citizen.

The organization of such activities is the first and most urgent business of every government. The administrators of earlier generations ignored the axioms, everywhere accepted today, that production depends upon the welfare, energy and will of the individual worker; that such welfare, energy and will decrease and degenerate in the individual whose physical health and education is below standard. Education and public health have heretofore been the last and least considerable item in the national budgets, which set aside immense sums for the construction of armaments, and for such economy in the past the States have paid and are still paying heavily in prisons, asylums, reformatories and hospital. Yet organization and public health are essential each to the other, and the late war has taught the civilized world the value both of human life and of the unity of effort. There is today no government which can afford to neglect the consideration of such problems. In every civilized nation the following fundamental principles are gradually being accepted as axiomatic:

1. Progress in the field of hygiene, prevention and social medicine, is dependent upon the average culture of the nation.

2. Every problem of hygiene should be regarded as essentially economic, and be worked out on the following lines:

- a) Unity of management; b) Unity of aim;
- c) Standardization of propaganda; d) Coordination of

- e) Training of personnel with adequate remuneration and assured career; f) Political significance of economic-social questions; g) Avowed principle that problems of preventive medicine are social problems, essential to the civilization of every individual nation, and that cooperation in such problems holds the promise of international economic and political peace.

Accepting these principles — universally acknowledged, though as yet hardly put into practice today — the more progressive nations have appointed Ministries of Hygiene, Preventive Medicine and Social Welfare, whose occupation is precisely with the political and economic aspects of the problems with which we are concerned. But while such state organizations are still in process of evolution it is essential that the independent institutions, already in existence, should demonstrate to governments and to public opinion alike the necessity for organization, in conformity with practical modern methods and with the collaboration of both Labour and Capital. Such institutions should accordingly, be organized on the following bases:

1. The problems of social medicine and hygiene are an essential part of the policy of every government, and if so understood and brought to the forefront of political activity, will become interwoven with the daily interests and work of the nation.

2. Employer and employed must alike be convinced of the political and economic value of social problems, and must realize that no social reconstruction can be permanent unless it be founded upon a right

understanding of the value of the life of every individual and upon a consistent programme of social relief and welfare.

3. In such work of social reform both Labour and Capital must cooperate.

4. Associations, Federations, and Syndicates, representing both the Employer and the Employed, may best realize the possibility of cooperation in the field of humanitarian work, where divisions of class, party, religion or nationality should be forgotten.

Three years ago, in harmony with these principles, the present writer founded the *Italian Institute of Hygiene, Prevention and Social Relief*. The Administrative Council of the Institute, at the express desire of the President of the Council, Hon. Mussolini, includes official representatives of the Confederation of Employers and of the Employed of every political party, and of those federal organizations which represent the great institutions of commerce, industry, and insurance, the official representatives of the Ministries of National Economy — the Bureau of Labour and of Social Welfare, the Bureau of Health, the Italian Red Cross, the Commissioner of Emigration and the Italian representatives of the League of Nations for the White Slave Traffic, associated with a group of technical experts.

The organization of this Institute, which I have the honour to direct, seems to therefore represent an initiative which may be taken into consideration, because it follows, theoretically and practically, the principles above indicated.

The possibility of international collaboration has already been demonstrated to the world by the beneficent and efficient activities of the International Bureau of Labour, the Section of Hygiene of the Society of Nations, the International League of the Red Cross, the International Association for the Protection of Children, the International Union for Prevention of Venereal Diseases, the International Federation of Welfare Work, the International Committee for Mental Hygiene, the International Council of Nursing, and of other institutions of which the writer may be unaware; while the Rockefeller Foundation, though it has no official international character, exercises a world-wide influence whose moral and practical value is beyond praise. It is perhaps outside the scope of the present article to question whether these institutions might not exercise a still more potent influence were they bound together in closer association. This suggestion might apply in particular to the International Bureau of Public Hygiene of Paris, and of the Section of Hygiene of the League of Nations, two organizations whose activities, though recently harmonized, would without doubt proceed with greater efficiency and economy were they united under a single political, technical, and administrative direction. The same might be said of the various associations of the Red Cross, in particular of the International Committee of the Red Cross of Geneva, and the League of Red Cross Societies, which are however tending, with praiseworthy persistence, to harmonize their field of work. I do not attempt to discuss the organizations of state institutions whose activities are already clearly defined and limited. The

International Office of Public Health of Paris and the Section of Hygiene of the League of Nations coordinate the activities of the governments which they represent, while the various organizations of the Red Cross have a programme whose sphere of work is directed by the societies of the individual nations. I do not therefore attempt to deal with such institutions in the project which I have the honour to propose for your consideration, but with the activities of those independent and federated organizations engaged in the work of social hygiene and prevention.

What is the present situation?

1. Coordination in preventive medicine and social work varies in every nation, but tends to a logical and necessary unity of effort. Campaigns against tuberculosis, cancer, venereal, mental and industrial diseases, maternity and infant welfare work, have been undertaken, by national federations, with conspicuous results.

2. Such national federations have cooperated in International Federations, with notable success. The International Bureau of Labour gives us perhaps the most striking example of such collaboration, since it unites in its activities representatives of both Capital and Labour, while the International Federations for hygiene and social work have for the most part adhered to the outworn methods of the scientific, philanthropic and voluntary organizations of former years.

3. A further stage in the evolution of social work has been reached in the United States of America, where the national organizations have been united in a National Council of Public Health, and in Belgium

where such institutions collaborate under the auspices of the Red Cross. Czecho-Slovakia and Jugoslavia show a similar tendency to unity of effort.

4. There remains, then, a final stage to be reached in the evolution of social work. It is this which the project that I shall propose to you seeks to realize; namely, the formation of an organization which shall correspond, in the international field, to the National Council of Public Health, of the United States of America.

The *Central International Committee* for the functional coordination of the International Federations of Preventive Medicine and Social Welfare should represent the coordination of all the independent non-official organizations engaged in such work. In so doing it would carry out the essential principle of unity of action in a common cause.

Such a Central Committee would necessarily exert a powerful influence by:

1. Demonstrating the necessity of such coordinative organizations (similar to the V. S. National Council of Public Health) in countries — and they are the majority — where they do not as yet exist.

2. Uniting in a single harmonizing organization the activities of the national federations already existing, and those which shall come into existence.

If we admit the value of a *Central International Committee* there remains only to be suggested an outline of its activities. Such a Committee should:

1. Initiate study of the moral, economic and scientific principles upon which the harmonization of the work of preventive medicine and hygiene, both national and international, shall proceed.

2. Call into being, upon the basis of such study, central organizations, such as the National Council of Public Health, which shall harmonize and organize the campaign against the social diseases and preventable maladjustments.

3. Induce such central organizations to apply the most approved methods of training of personnel for common aims.

4. Encourage the study of standardization of scientific and economic methods of work, and of propaganda (literature, films, etc.) both for reasons of efficiency and economy.

5. Establish a central headquarters of research, study and documentation, which shall put at the disposition of every nation the results of the collective experience in social work.

6. Circulate an international journal, or other periodical publications, which shall demonstrate the value of the work of coordination.

The Central International Committee should be constituted by two representatives of the above-mentioned organizations, and of those which shall be formed in the future.

The headquarters of the Central Committee might well be established with those of the League of Red Cross Societies at Paris, thus profiting by the prestige of that organization, and by the advantages of situation in a great capital, while at the same time avoiding the expenditure of an independent headquarters.

I have thought it right to indicate to you, Sir, the reasons which in my opinion would justify the constitution of such a Central International Committee, but

at the same time would suggest that the By-laws of the Committee should be enacted at a meeting attended by representative of those organizations which shall make up its membership. I do not presume to advise them. I would ask your indulgence if, with the desire to summarize the moral, economic and social principles which underlie the work upon which we are engaged, I have unduly trespassed upon your attention: these principles, are, however, those upon which the activities of the Red Cross Society have been founded since its beginning. Permit me to end by bringing before your notice the words of one of the great spirits of our days, Rabindranath Tagore, which seem to me to illustrate the needs and the paradoxes of the present hour: « The most important fact of the present age is that the races of mankind have come into contact each with the other. We find ourselves faced with an alternative: either the different groups will continue to exterminate each other, or they will discover a true basis of reconciliation and mutual help. Those who are gifted with the power of loving and with the vision of spiritual unity, those who have the least prejudice against the stranger, those who by instinctive sympathy know how to put themselves in another's place, it is they who will best be fitted to play a leading part in the days which are to come. On the other hand those who are only busied in developing their combative instinct and their intolerance will be eliminated.

In my own country we have sought to discover something which every race has in common, something which should bear witness to their true unity. They

will never be united in the fields of commerce or of politics; but the thinkers and the men of moral power will find a common ground of unity, and will become increasingly aware of it, and will make it known to the others. In discovering the solution of our own problem we shall help to solve that of the world. The case of India is becoming that of the world at large. The time will come when you also will look for a common basis of unity which is other than political ».

I believe that the great Indian prophet is right. I believe that such a foundation of unity, such a ground of reconciliation, is offered to the civilized world by the great field of work for the betterment of humanity, by preventive medicine and by social welfare.

I am, Sir,

Very respectfully yours
ETTORE LEVI.

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