

## PUBLIC HEALTH

# A Decade of "Good War"

The World Health Organization celebrates its tenth anniversary this year. The World Health Assembly is being held in the United States for the first time.

By HOWARD SIMONS

► A WORLD WAR has been raging for the last ten years that refutes Benjamin Franklin's oft-quoted quip, "There never was a good war or a bad peace." Ironically, this war is a good one and if it were stopped, countless thousands would die.

The war is against disease. It is being waged by the World Health Organization which is known popularly everywhere by its wonderful acronym WHO.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of this unique international health organization. On May 26, the World Health Assembly, WHO's policy-making body, opened its annual meeting in Minneapolis, Minn. This marks the first time the Assembly has gathered in the United States.

On May 26 and 27, the Assembly met in special session to commemorate its first decade of service to mankind. From May 28 through June 14, delegates and technical advisers from the 88 nations that support WHO are rolling up their sleeves to tackle the problems of policy, direction and finances for the second decade.

## United Nations' Creation

WHO is a specialized agency created by the United Nations but has its own independent membership, its own governing body and its own budget.

Historically, the UN summoned an International Health Conference in New York City in 1946. There WHO's Constitution was signed by 61 countries. By 1948, enough nations had ratified their membership to allow the organization as it is known today to come into official being as a specialized agency of the UN.

Briefly, WHO has done, and is continuing to do, the following:

1. Assist 120 countries and territories throughout the world to fight disease, train health workers and strengthen national health services.
2. Operate a watchdog service that gives immediate warning of any outbreak of pestilential disease.
3. Bring all countries of the world the latest information on new methods of fighting disease and building health.
4. Set up universal health regulations for travel and trade, and recommend international standards for drugs and vaccines.

The cost during the current year of 1958 for all these activities will be \$13,500,000—one-half cent for each human being on earth.

Statistically, WHO's record is an impressive one to say the least. With numbers, charts and maps WHO workers can point

out that they now have malaria, tuberculosis, venereal diseases and yaws on the run. They can also show how they are waging a relentless battle against 40 other world-wide illnesses from leprosy and rabies to plague and yellow fever.

Statistics, however, cannot tell all of WHO's story. Facts and figures can never quite tell exactly how this global battle has meant relief of human suffering from almost antiseptic American streets to jungle-stifling villages in Africa.

Statistics cannot convey what it means for a youngster who was once doomed to disease to realize that now he or she might live to marry. Statistics will not describe the feeling of a mother who once knew that death stalked each of her newborn, but who can now look forward to grandchildren.

Ten years is not a very long time when measured against the eons of a disease-ravaged mankind, but progress in these same ten years to make the world disease-free far outweighs the calendar and the clock.

There is a quiet optimism voiced by the tireless WHO workers that some day the dream of a future without infectious disease will not be too far off. But with the optimism, there is always caution — soft warning that the world faces new problems



**WORLD HEALTH**—This youngster now has a healthy chance of escaping both the flies on his face and the breeding ground for disease at his feet, thanks to the sanitation work of his country and the World Health Organization, which is celebrating its tenth anniversary of war against disease this year.

and that the mass control of infectious disease does not solve all health problems nor end disease.

"The ten years just past," says Dr. H. van Zile Hyde, chief of the U. S. Public Health Service's international health division, "have demonstrated that man now has at his command the knowledge and the will to eliminate infectious disease from the world. The accomplishment thus far is great; the promise greater."

### Forgotten Terrors

Dr. Hyde goes on to point out that in some areas of the world the public has fully forgotten the terrors of cholera, plague, smallpox and yellow fever, thanks to man's concerted effort to stamp out these infectious diseases. Parents, he adds, no longer fear measles, diphtheria, scarlet fever and whooping cough. Malaria has been eradicated, tuberculosis is fast disappearing, and very recently there has been major advance against poliomyelitis.

However, Dr. Hyde warns, "as the control of infectious disease advances, other problems and diseases take on new importance."

One that Dr. Hyde cites as an example he terms the "chemical miasma." Humans throughout the world, he explains, use millions of pounds of chemicals on their food-stuffs, take millions of pounds more as pills and capsules, and expel more millions still as gases into the atmosphere.

How dangerous is this chemical miasma? No one really knows yet but, Dr. Hyde says, the facts that are known "indicate something of the problem in the chemical sphere that emerges as infectious disease recedes."

"Since ancient times, and all the world over, people have dreamed of a paradise on earth, cattle and green pastures, and the promise of a peaceful, long and happy life."

### Science: Instrument for Survival

This is mankind's dream that is coming true, in the opinion of another WHO worker, Dr. Axel Hojer, formerly director-general of the Swedish Medical Board, and currently professor of social and preventive medicine at Assam Medical College, India.

"Man, like the animals, has instincts and habits which keep him strong and healthy, or at least alive, until he has produced offspring," Dr. Hojer says.

"But in the last hundred years, and especially during the last ten years, man has forged a new and better instrument for survival, called science.

"Scientific experiment has deepened our knowledge and our understanding and even failures and mistakes have taught their lessons.

"Better knowledge has brought better health. Life is becoming longer and healthier in place after place, and man seems to have found out how to make his dream of a paradise on earth come true."

However, Dr. Hojer also cautions, "the realization of this aim is not easy. In every country the same problems present themselves in different ways. As one disease is

eradicated, one problem solved, others grow in importance. A longer life brings with it special problems connected with old age.

"The lesson of the last ten years of health progress is nevertheless clear. Health for all is no longer an unattainable ideal, but an everyday reality well within man's grasp."

Science News Letter, May 31, 1958

### ENTOMOLOGY

## Thirty Years' War Against Buffalo Fly

➤ A SILENT war has been fought in Australia's Northern Territory for more than 30 years against a tiny insect, about half the size of a common house fly and known as the buffalo fly. It invaded the northern part of Australia about 110 years ago.

The fly arrived with buffaloes imported from Indonesia when the first British military establishments were set up on the coast of northern Australia. The fly soon became firmly entrenched, and has developed into the worst cattle pest ever known in Australia.

The fly is not a disease carrier like the tick, and its bites do not kill, but it is a blood sucker. It worries livestock until they are valueless.

Maddened by the bites, the animals rub themselves against trees, rocks, wire fences and other obstructions until they are a mass of sores. As many as 5,000 flies have been found on one beast.

The insects feed on their animal hosts for about ten days. Their eggs hatch in warm weather within 20 hours and then more insects start feeding on the animal.

For years scientists have been trying to control the fly. They have been successful in some parts of North Australia, but the fly has spread to other areas, particularly West Australia.

A few years ago, a special wasp was introduced and mated with a local wasp, the resulting hybrid being released in the hope that it might attack the fly. The wasp did not attack the fly, so scientists are now looking around for another insect with which to fight the buffalo fly.

Science News Letter, May 31, 1958

### PEDIATRICS

## Caustic Cleansers Cause Most Infant Gullet Burns

➤ CAUSTIC CLEANSERS are the most frequent cause of chemical burns of the esophagus or gullet in children six years of age and under.

Such common household items as ammonia, bleaching solutions and battery or soldering acids also frequently cause accidental chemical burns of the esophagus, Drs. Kenneth C. Johnston and Paul H. Holinger of the University of Illinois College of Medicine, told the Illinois State Medical Society meeting in Chicago.

Sometimes a solution of the caustic, either sodium or potassium hydroxide, is mixed in a pop bottle, glass or cup normally used for drinking. This mixture is left within a

youngster's reach. Sometimes, they said, a child consumes carelessly placed powders or crystals.

Occasionally, a mother gives her baby a teaspoon of lysol or pure lactic acid from a bottle she mistook for cough medicine or cod liver oil.

The surgeons stressed the importance of early treatment and the continuation of therapy for several weeks even when there is no apparent sign of a burn.

If a caustic has possibly been swallowed, it is wiser to assume that burns have occurred in the esophagus and to start treatment immediately, the surgeons suggested. If treatment is delayed, the esophagus may become abnormally narrow due to excessive overgrowth of the surrounding tissue, they said.

Science News Letter, May 31, 1958

## RADIO

Saturday, June 7, 1958, 1:30-1:45 p.m., EDT

"Adventures in Science" with Watson Davis, director of Science Service, over the CBS Radio network. Check your local CBS station.

Dr. Francis Marott Sinex, professor and chairman of the department of chemistry, Boston University School of Medicine, Boston, Mass., will discuss "Aging and Cardiovascular Disease."

### PSYCHIATRY

## Place of Tranquilizers Still to Be Determined

➤ THE PROPER place for tranquilizers in treating the mentally ill is not clear, Dr. Lothar B. Kalinowsky of the New York State Psychiatric Institute, New York, reported at the American Psychiatric Association meeting in San Francisco.

Dr. Kalinowsky came to the Institute from Rome in 1940 to introduce the then new electroshock treatment that is still in wide use.

He said there is confusion over what is meant by "tranquilizers." The phenothiazines and Rauwolfia drugs are called tranquilizers, but so also are the meprobamates. These include Miltown and Equanil, which are really more like the older drugs called sedatives, as shown by the occurrence of withdrawal psychoses resembling those after the sudden withdrawal of barbiturates.

Such withdrawal symptoms do not follow the cessation of the phenothiazines. In fact, the phenothiazines can be used to counteract such withdrawal symptoms from other drugs.

Adding to the confusion is the fact that appraisal of tranquilizers in large institutions differs radically from the opinions of psychiatrists who have used the drugs for the type of patients seen in private practice.

The phenothiazines and Rauwolfia drugs are extremely useful for the control of excitement in psychotic patients, Dr. Kalinowsky concluded. However, if they are given to anxiety ridden neurotics, the anxiety is often aggravated.

Science News Letter, May 31, 1958