

THE PATHOLOGY OF CAPTIVITY

Shortly after the 4th International Medical Congress of the International Federation of Resistance Movements (of which an account was given in the October 1964 issue of the *International Review*), the Second International Medical Congress on the Pathology of Captivity was held in Cologne on November 7 and 8, 1964.

This was organized by the International Confederation of Former Prisoners of War and took place under the chairmanship of Dr. Pierre Houssa, of Brussels. Dr. Gerhard Denecke, Head Physician of the German Red Cross in the Federal Republic of Germany, represented the ICRC, in whose name he delivered an address at the opening session.

The doctors and experts who attended had come from six European countries and were all specialists in the pathology of captivity. They presented various papers and were able to discuss with all the authority conferred on them by their own experience of captivity or their observations of delayed sequels among their patients.

This international conference permitted a comprehensive inventory of the results of scientific research on the following subjects to be drawn up: the heart and blood vessels, infectious diseases (tuberculosis, tropical illnesses, epidemics), digestive system disorders, rheumatology, premature aging and causes of death, the nervous system, mental states, as well as social and medical rehabilitation.

At one of the sessions, a working group from Cologne, represented by an official of the Ministry of Health of the Federal Republic of Germany, presented a paper on the psycho-pathological effects of captivity and persecution. These subjects, which set problems which do not fall into any of the categories defined by former criteria of social service, were a transitional background to the final paper on "rehabilitation", one of the main future tasks.

It is in this context that indemnity should be paid to former prisoners for injuries sustained, whether physical, psychical or social, which cash payment cannot adequately compensate.

Dr. Houssa, who now runs the rehabilitation centre set up by the Belgian Government, described rehabilitation practice in

Belgium. Although he is an orthopaedist, he did not remain within the bounds of his speciality for, in fact, he advocated thorough and genuine rehabilitation for former prisoners of war. "What we want", he said, "is that those who suffer from ailments, due to detention in concentration camps and the like, benefit from the therapeutics and legal advantages to which they are entitled . . ." Consideration is given with increasing humanity not only to man's health but even more to his welfare. "With all his awareness of his value amidst the events which shake his world, man is drawn closer to his neighbour and lives in hope of a great brotherhood." Hope, furthermore, is a fundamental principle in the medical science of rehabilitation. Dr. Henri Kessler described it in the following manner: "Man can live three weeks without eating, three days without drinking, three minutes without breathing, but he cannot live without hope".

During the opening session, Mr. R. Nachez, President of the International Confederation of Former Prisoners of War, recalled that the Cologne Conference should lay stress on the various aspects of the pathology of captivity, but particularly on the premature aging observed and studied in former prisoners of war. From this particular point of view these days of study already constitute a scientific event of no little importance. He considered that the Conference would no doubt assert again that the delayed sequels to captivity are not an illusion nor a specious supposition, but a fact which is becoming more firmly established than ever. "I think," he added, "that we are on the right path of progress demanded in our time and leading to the development of human knowledge and the strengthening of the bonds of fellowship among men".

Like the Bucharest Congress of the International Federation of Resistance Movements, the Cologne Conference confirmed the conclusions drawn from previous congresses on aetiology, pathology, treatment and social consequences of premature aging. It passed a resolution recalling the rights of former prisoners of war; this was concluded as follows:

In view of the existence of a common denominator, that is to say the progressive asthenia syndrome and the premature wearing out of the organism,

the Medical Conference of Cologne :

- draws the attention of governments and public authorities to the urgency of the measures for reparation and reclassification already studied at the Conferences of The Hague and Brussels ;
- considers that provision should be made without delay in order to :
 - a) admit the irrefutable medical proof now being produced by the conferences so far organized by the International Confederation of Former Prisoners of War and the World Veterans Federation,
 - b) promote legislation including the recognition of presumed responsibility for illnesses which remain latent for an indefinite time and for which no penalty is imposed,
 - c) recognize, inter alia, the right to pensions before normal retiring age, together with its advantages and the adaptation of existing legislation ;
- hopes for an increase in exchanges of information and of scientific and technical research on all such medical and social problems at the international level ;
- emphasizes, as was done at previous conferences, the practical utility of health reports issued in specialized centres and of the wide dissemination to all doctors of results achieved in the field of captivity pathology.

In his closing speech, Mr. R. Nachez said that doctors, the friends and companions of prisoners of war, had revived hope in them when they were undergoing hardship and assailed by despair. It can be said that the faith they have displayed demands that we today do all we can to make the remainder of their days worth living for those who have sacrificed so much. He emphasized the necessity of bearing in mind that these sacrifices should not be in vain, that they should contribute to bringing peace to the world.