

M I S C E L L A N E O U S

WORLD HEALTH DAY

World Health Day is observed each year on 7 April. The theme chosen for 1963 was *Hunger: Disease of Millions*, and the object was to draw attention to malnutrition as a direct cause of disease and a major factor in maintaining low health levels among a great part of the world's population. World Health Day thus supports FAO's Freedom from Hunger Campaign.

The following is the message which Dr. M. G. Candau, Director-General of the World Health Organization, sent on this occasion :

When people were facing death by famine they knew only too well what was happening to them: but today millions are ill without understanding that the cause is a total or partial lack of necessary food elements.

In those countries where most people cannot afford meat, fish, eggs, milk or nutritious vegetable foods to eat with their usual cereal meals, widespread malnutrition results in a low resistance to diseases and diminished working capacity which add to the national burdens of ill health and economic loss.

But the principal victims of this insidious form of hunger are infants and children. Millions of them become sick and many die in their early years simply because they do not get enough protein in their food, while many of those who survive fall an easy prey to other illnesses of childhood.

The only lasting remedy for this widespread malnutrition is to produce inexpensive foods containing sufficient protein, vitamins and so on and persuade people to make them part of their regular diet. This may not be easy since food habits and established beliefs about food are part of the whole fabric of the life of a people, and are usually slow to change.

Certain diseases directly caused by bad nutrition such as beri-beri, pellagra, scurvy, rickets, goitre, anaemia and a type of blindness in

children have with better nutrition already disappeared from many countries and would disappear everywhere if people's everyday food contained sufficient amounts of the essential elements.

When doctors, nurses and health workers are receiving their training it is important that they understand the close relation between good nutrition and health so that they can teach and influence the people among whom they are to work. Research is needed, too, for there are still serious gaps in our knowledge of all the ill effects of the different types of hunger.

In today's world hunger is indeed a disease of millions. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has launched a world-wide Freedom from Hunger Campaign in which the World Health Organization is wholeheartedly co-operating. It is my hope that on this World Health Day people everywhere in the world will try to visualize this problem of hunger and the disease and death that go with it. Remedies are largely known—they call for simultaneous action on the agricultural, medical and educational fronts and this action, to be successful, must have the participation of governments and of peoples in all countries, rich and poor.

Our ill-fed world.—More than half the world's population, now estimated at 3000 million, are victims of hunger or inadequate nutrition in one form or another. Over large areas of the world people's everyday meals are insufficient; the children go without milk after they are weaned and child mortality between the ages of one and five is often fifteen times higher than it is in places where people are able to get proper food.

All this is nothing new. It is probable that the world has never in its history fed all its people adequately. The difference is that today, thanks to the discoveries of science, which has advanced more in the last 100 years than in the previous 2000 years, we already have the knowledge and power to produce sufficient food, measured on a health standard, for more than twice the population of the world. If our existing knowledge were put to work where it is needed most of the diseases that stem from hunger could be eliminated or controlled.

This is one answer to the pessimists who claim that the world's population is outrunning the world's capacity to produce food.

Indeed, according to a recent survey, world food production in 1962-63 is expected to increase faster than the growth of population, estimated at a world rate of two per cent. annually.

Unhappily this does not mean that the world's food problem is solved, for the greatest increase in food production is in those countries where food is already plentiful, and the least in those where it is most needed. Another regrettable fact is that in those regions where the need is greatest, not sufficient effort is made to produce the nutritious protein foods whose lack is largely responsible for the diseases of malnutrition.

Despite increasing populations, the advanced countries are feeding better than ever. For example, in North America, where population has risen by about 35 per cent. since the Second World War, production has been raised by more than 60 per cent. and output per man-hour by over 100 per cent. Particular instances will sharpen the contrast between developed and under-developed countries. In Japan, the yield per hectare of arable land is approximately three to four times the yield per hectare in India ; Europe obtains four times as much meat and milk per head of cattle as are obtained in Latin America and the Near East, seven times as much as in Africa, and ten times as much as in the Far East.

World Food Programme.—Food output may be so high in particular countries or regions that local surpluses accumulate. These surpluses do not move into international trade, chiefly because the countries needing more food do not have the money to buy them.

As a partial remedy, the United Nations and the Food and Agriculture Organization have jointly launched a World Food Programme whose aim is to use surpluses in an orderly way to promote economic and social development. It is now beginning operations.

However, surpluses only amount to a small fraction of world production. It is estimated that surplus stocks of grain amount to about 130 million tons, the vast bulk of which is held in North America. This is a big stock. Even so, it could only provide the calorie intake of the world population for two months.

If used to correct the average deficiency of about 200 calories

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per person per day in the Far East, the stocks could only achieve this for a little over three years.

Supposing these inequalities could be levelled out, there would remain the even more important question of the quality of the food produced. Here again, the improvement is only in some regions. In Western Europe, for example, one of the most important developments during the past years has been the increasing consumption of meat and other valuable sources of protein. An illustration of the trend is provided by France. Statistically speaking, the average Frenchman in 1958 ate 13 kilogrammes more meat than he did in 1948, while consumption of milk and dairy products increased by one third. In the same period, the consumption of cereals and starchy roots gradually declined in Western Europe as other foods became more abundant. For the region as a whole, the average daily food intake, in quantitative terms, is above the estimated requirements.

Much the same can be said of North America. Consumption of cereals has fallen while consumption of meat, milk and dairy products has increased. In the United States of America, for example, the average *per caput* consumption of cereals fell by 10 kilogrammes between 1948 and 1958, while in the same period consumption of milk and dairy products remained unchanged. Consumption of meat rose to a point well above the pre-war average and the mean daily intake of protein is among the highest in the world.

These are the relatively fortunate regions of the world. One of the regions where grave food and nutrition problems persist is the Far East. Here, diets are generally deficient, especially in consumption of animal products such as meat, eggs and milk, which have the greatest nutritional value. In the region as a whole the consumption of such animal products is less than one third of what it is in the United States of America and Oceania. As distribution is rarely equitable, it is safe to say that great numbers of people in the Far East have much less of these nourishing foods than the statistical averages indicate. To bring the nutritional levels up to a point where even a barely adequate diet is possible for the growing populations of Far Eastern countries will be an enormous long-range task.

Little exact information is available on the food consumption in most of Africa, but it can be assumed that the situation is roughly similar to that in the Far East. It is known, for example, that protein malnutrition is widespread.

Facts of life.—In sum, millions upon millions of men, women and children cannot obtain enough good food to nourish themselves adequately. With all that it means in terms of human suffering and economic misery, this is one of the most important facts of life in the world today.

The measures necessary to solve the problem of food cannot be carried out successfully by any one country or small group of countries. By its very nature, the problem of food is both national and international and action to solve it must also be both national and international. For hunger and malnutrition are no respecters of frontiers. They are to be found in every country of the world.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has organized a world Freedom from Hunger Campaign which was officially launched on 1 July 1960 by Dr. B. R. Sen, Director-General of FAO. The Campaign, which is continuing over a period of five years, is essentially a joint effort of all governments, the United Nations and its specialized agencies, non-governmental organizations, social and professional groups, industrial and commercial concerns and private individuals throughout the world. The main object of the Campaign is to create a climate of informed world opinion that will make possible a sustained, lasting attack on a massive scale on malnutrition and undernourishment in the world. It will call not only for vastly increased financial and technical assistance from the developed countries but also for a correspondingly bigger and more vigorous effort by the countries concerned. This is an enterprise in which we are all involved.
