

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

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## CHILD HEALTH AND WELFARE POLICIES

*Recently, the Director-General of the International Children's Centre, Dr Etienne Berthet, gave a particularly valuable lecture at the Lisbon Child Welfare Association. The Centre's Courrier has reproduced the text of his lecture,<sup>1</sup> from which we have taken extensive passages. The subject is of special importance for the Red Cross, which has set up and continues to organize in numerous countries dispensaries for pre-natal consultation, mother and child care centres, preventoriums, orphanages, children's polyclinics. In these centres, doctors, nurses and social assistants are at work, under the sign of the red cross, red crescent and red lion and sun.*

From time immemorial, and in every country throughout the world, men have felt concern for the inequalities which exist, right from the moment of birth, and become more and more marked throughout life. It is, however, only in recent years that various nations have become really aware of their responsibilities and have taken concrete measures to find solutions to the misery experienced by children throughout the world, for whom hunger, sickness, ignorance and hardship still form part of the everyday pattern of life.

The causes of such misery are too deep to be removed by the simple provision of food and medicine, and however great a generosity is shown, it is likely to prove fruitless if it is confined to temporary assistance and fails to tackle the heart of the problem.

It has been said, and quite rightly too, that the efforts made by a nation to help its children are the most reliable indication of its development, as they call not only for a high material and cultural level, but also for considerable moral qualities. The protection of children and the young generation closely follows the

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<sup>1</sup> Paris, Château de Longchamp, January-February 1973, No. 1.

social and economic development of the countries concerned. In a great many countries, this work has met with serious financial and technical difficulties owing to the lack of resources and qualified staff, and to the resistance of populations which, either through ignorance or unconcern, resist the measures designed to protect them.

This awareness of responsibilities has taken concrete shape in the "Declaration of the Rights of the Child", which was unanimously accepted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 November 1959.

In its ten articles, the Declaration of 20 November 1959 recognized that the child, in view of his lack of physical and intellectual maturity, must be given special attention and care; that he is entitled to good health and education, to emotional and material security, and to respect and protection without any discrimination of any nature. The Declaration states, moreover, that these rights engage the responsibility of all those who are concerned with his protection and education, and, of course, in the first place, the responsibility of the parents.

The Declaration is an expression of the current thinking in respect of children. It does not put forward any original doctrine, nor does it set out any new schemes, but it does mark an awareness and a desire for action which should guide the work being done for child welfare in all countries of the world.

The essential difficulty is getting mankind to understand and implement this new policy; the latter should not simply be the subject of declarations of intent, but thorough studies and concrete work. With these aims in mind, the United Nations Children's Fund organized in April 1964, at Bellagio (Italy), a round-table discussion on "future plans for child welfare in the developing countries". This conference was attended by planners and specialists in child welfare, and by representatives of the specialized agencies of the United Nations and the International Children's Centre.

This new trend in child health and welfare policies posed the problem of its incorporation in the economic and social development plans of the various countries. "It is a fundamental problem of doctrine and principle. For example, in the initial phase of determining development programmes, priority is normally given to the

production of wealth. But in reality it is essential, whilst following an economic policy aimed at adapting the country to the modern world, to pay due consideration to man himself. Indeed, the man of tomorrow is the child of to-day. This is why the welfare of children and the young generation is important in any balanced development programme" (R. Debré).

The fundamental idea which emerged from these multi-disciplinary contacts is that whilst economic growth is a pre-requisite for development, it is not sufficient by itself. The aim of any economic effort is to foster mankind's interests, which presupposes a real awareness of his fundamental needs, priority being given to the most delicate and vulnerable groups: mothers, children and the young generation in general.

The result of all of these exchanges was to give a new dimension to the policy of child welfare in the present-day world. It took a wider and deeper dimension, and its objective became not simply to combat sickness, reduce the death rate and number of persons suffering from disabilities, but also to prepare the child for life, his integration in the world of adults, and to overcome the various physical, mental and social incompatibilities which threaten him.

The child should always be considered in all his complexity and from all aspects of his personality: biological, psychological and social—and none should be neglected for the sake of the others. There is a close interdependence between the physical and mental development of the child on the one hand, and his ability to acquire knowledge and professional integration on the other.

The complexity of the problems which arise in connection with child welfare requires team-work, in which each member contributes the information gained through his technique and analyses; the team must include doctors, nutrition experts, sociologists and psychologists, educationalists and experts in demography, economists and town planners, administrators and politicians.

All of the problems raised by the development and protection of children and adolescents are complementary and interrelated. They cannot be dissociated, and must be dealt with from an overall approach which takes into account all aspects of their personality (biological, psychological and social aspects), at all ages (from conception to integration in the adult world), in all the environments

in which they are to live (family, school, professional and social). This overall approach can be achieved only by regrouping and co-ordinating the efforts made in the various branches of human activity which are related to health and social welfare, education and occupational training.

Although the task of the doctor is to be a good practitioner of medicine, it must not be forgotten that to be a good practitioner requires not only a perfect knowledge of the preventive, clinical and therapeutic aspects of sickness, but also of their emotional, family, social and economic aspects. Today, the doctor must not only combat sickness but also prevent it and do everything possible to promote health, which should be understood as the harmonious and balanced development of all human abilities.

Whilst the school-teacher's task is to teach children, he must also be concerned with what they will do with their knowledge, and prepare them for a happy family, professional and social life. The school-teacher must contribute to "building the man", which according to Montaigne means "giving children a good head, rather than a full head"; this presupposes a knowledge of the pre-requisites for this: a healthy body and mind.

Whilst the economist's task is to draw up development plans, he must not forget the interdependence between the economic and social aspects, and similarly he must know that "the greatest wealth of a country is its people, expressed in quantity and appreciated in quality; it is a great force if everything is done to keep it healthy, enable it to acquire knowledge, work and develop its abilities to the maximum; it is, however, a great weakness, if, for any reason, man cannot find in his environment the means of full development, not only physical but also psychological and social" (A. Sauvy).

Medicine and social or educational work are activities which know no frontiers. This does not mean that the doctor, social worker and child specialist may possess the sum total of knowledge required to cover all of the aspects of the personality of the children whom they are tending; it does, however, mean that they have a duty, when they are working on the boundaries of their own specific field, to ask for help from any technical staff who may be able to complete and put a finishing touch to their work.

*After mentioning the planning work undertaken since the end of the Second World War in connection with child health and welfare, and the problems caused by the shortage of qualified staff in all branches relating to health, education and social welfare, the author discusses the trend of child health and welfare policies in coming years.*

...“ Whilst it is essential to continue the measures against the scourges which have afflicted humanity for thousands of years (indeed, carelessness in a vaccination scheme may well result in the re-appearance of a contagious disease), there will be new problems arising over the next ten years to which we must devote our attention.

Already today we may mention six of these:

1. The population explosion and rise of the younger generations with all their requirements in respect of health, education, professional training and social work. In 1970, there were in the world 1,200 million children under 15 years of age. In 1980, according to United Nations forecasts there will be more than 1,500 million, which represents more than 40% of the total population.

The confidence which certain people place in a general policy based on the widespread use of contraceptives as the sole means of birth control does not seem realistic. Such a policy will be effective only if accompanied by an improvement in the cultural, economic and social level of the population concerned. Experience in the developed countries, states a UN document, tends to prove that the attitude of people to the size of the family begins to change only when the economic and social conditions as a whole have improved, and when it is realized that having too many children is likely to harm the well-being of the family instead of improving it.

2. The increased rate of scientific and technical progress in all fields of biology, psychopedagogy, and sociology will force us to revise our concepts and approaches to the problems. The resultant elimination of natural selection will increase the number of the physically and mentally handicapped.

## MISCELLANEOUS

3. The destruction of the traditional family structures will have an all the more marked effect on adolescents seeing that in the majority of developing countries there are no welfare centres which deal with the professional or cultural and social aspects.

4. Town development, industrialization and population movements are, because of the mental stresses which they cause, factors which give rise to social incompatibility—affecting first of all the young generations.

5. The new dangers of pollution of the environment, atmosphere, water, earth and food, owing to chemicals or radioactive fall-out—and the latter constitutes a particular threat because of its effects on the genetic heritage.

6. The advancement of our knowledge of the structure of living matter, which will perhaps enable us in the future to influence the pattern of human reproduction—with all the dangers which may result from such action.”

*In his conclusion, Dr Etienne Berthet stresses the need for technical co-operation on an international scale with a view to providing child health and welfare assistance in the developing countries.*

...“ Just as there is the notion of the “ economic cost ” of progress, there is the notion of the “ social cost ”, to which we must devote our attention. For many men, the sacrifice of their cultural and religious attachment seems to be too high a price to pay for an improved material well-being. For example, in certain areas referred to as “ under-developed ” there is a high degree of well-being and happiness, although these differ very considerably from our western standards; any alteration to their way of life may well give rise to individual and collective unrest. Each phase in the development of a society always has a negative side and a positive side which we must not underestimate. Is it not true that the disappearance of a certain tradition, or a change in a given social structure can lead to much more serious trouble than that which we are striving to remove ?

For this reason, international technical co-operation should be confined to well-proven techniques with which it is familiar and experienced, and must not cut across all of the religious, cultural and moral values, which differ according to the civilizations concerned and constitute a field in which it is difficult to be certain of the truth. Material well-being and happiness are two different notions. We know that technical civilization does not make men better or happier. But whereas happiness through asceticism and privation is an individual ideal for certain members of the élite who are devoted to a great cause, it is nevertheless true that hundreds of millions of men aspire to be freed from hunger, sickness, ignorance and misery.

The assistance given can only be fully successful if it is not confined to technical aid, but also pervaded by a soul. What matters is not only the number of hospitals and factories built, the number of miles of roads opened up and the nature of the port facilities, but the active and confident collaboration of the peoples concerned in the work which is being carried out.

The development of the less fortunate countries depends rather more on themselves, their own individual efforts, and their desire to progress, than on any aid from outside. There is a difficult task of integration of past and future, and of tradition and evolution; without doubt, this is the most delicate and vital aspect of the help which the more fortunate countries can give to the less fortunate."

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