

In memoriam

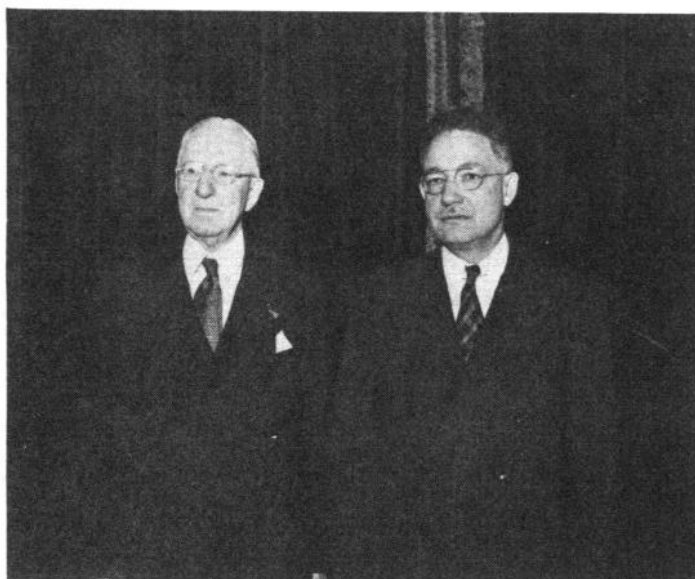
DR. FRED L. SOPER

1893-1977

**Director of the Pan American
Sanitary Bureau, 1947-1959
Director Emeritus, 1959-1977**

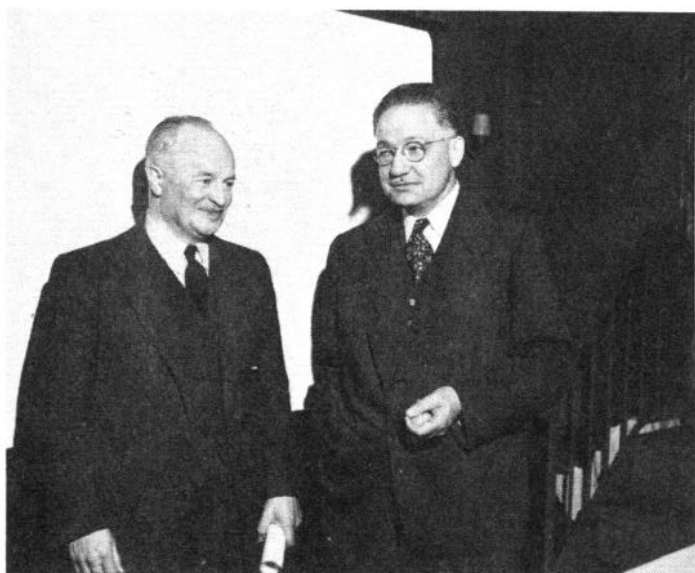
The death of Dr. Fred L. Soper in his native state of Kansas on 9 February brings to a close a signal chapter in the history of international public health. The contribution he made in behalf of the peoples of Latin America and the rest of the world is reflected in the events of his long and fruitful career.

Little is recorded about his life as a student at Rush Medical College, where he received his M.D. degree in 1918, or about the events that led him to leave his country and join the Rockefeller Foundation in 1920 to work on the problem of hookworm disease in Brazil. It is clear, however, that in this undertaking he set the pattern that was to characterize his life's work, always facing tasks with a spirit of challenge and ignoring that which on many occasions must have represented defeat.



1947

Dr. Hugh S. Cumming, outgoing Director of the Bureau, together with Dr. Soper in Caracas.



1948

Dr. Soper and Dr. Brock Chisholm, Director-General of WHO.



1949

Signing of the agreement whereby the Bureau came to serve also as Regional Office of WHO for the Americas.

After earning his doctorate in public health at The Johns Hopkins University, Dr. Soper became the Rockefeller Foundation's Regional Director for South America in 1927, a post in which he served until 1942. During these years he called upon a team of public health specialists to carry out research on the control of yellow fever, and, at a time when environmental conditions in the Brazilian tropics were far from favorable, he marshaled scarce human and material resources in the fight against this disease. The guiding concept, strict in discipline and at the same time truly effective, was to become legend in the annals of disease control. In a world rapidly shrinking thanks to the advent of new means of transportation—which ultimately were to work to the advantage of the yellow fever vector—Dr. Soper and his men declared a race against the forces of nature. They may not have had all the benefits of modern technology, but in Dr. Soper they had an inspired leader who with his firm and unshaking conviction was to carry them forward in this new field of disease eradication. The Brazilian Government provided support not only in his untiring fight against yellow fever but also in the campaign he had mounted against malaria, which in 1938 was threatening to spread throughout all of tropical America following the introduction of *Anopheles gambiae* from Africa.

Later, without abandoning his commitment to the eradication of these two diseases, Dr. Soper accepted to serve as a civilian member of the U.S. Typhus Commission. This assignment was to take him to Egypt, where he studied the use of insecticide powders to combat the deadly form of typhus fever which up until then had been an inevitable wartime scourge. The Rockefeller Foundation's Typhus Group, organized by Dr. Soper in 1943, worked in Algeria and Italy, where insecticide powders were shown to be impressive-

ly effective in eliminating lice, thus enabling the Allied Forces to put an end to typhus epidemics in Europe by the end of World War II.

In 1947 Dr. Soper was elected Director of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau. With the support of the Governments of the Hemisphere, he was to turn its program, relatively limited and inactive when he took it over, into a dynamic and rapidly expanding undertaking. When he signed the agreement which was to give the Bureau its additional role as Regional Office of the World Health Organization for the Americas—a step that brought it many advantages—the Bureau already had 47 years of experience and was the oldest intergovernmental public health organization in the world. During the 12 years under Dr. Soper's directorship, it not only embarked on broad new campaigns against the communicable diseases but it also initiated efforts to bring together groups which up to that time had been working in isolation. Nurses, veterinarians, dentists, sanitary engineers, statisticians—all these and others as well were added to the international health team; the era of technical cooperation and exchange of specialists was underway, and the benefits of experience and progress were ultimately to be felt in all the countries.

Upon completion of his third elected term in office in 1959, Dr. Soper was named Director Emeritus. In that year and in 1960 he served as a consultant on health matters for the U.S. foreign aid program, and during the following two years he directed the newly established Cholera Research Laboratory in Dacca, Bangladesh. After 1962 he worked for several years as a part-time consultant for the U.S. Public Health Service's Office of International Health.

In the course of his dedicated endeavor, which spanned at least half a century, Dr. Soper published more than a hundred



1953

*Dr. Soper and Dr. M. G. Candau,
Director-General of WHO.*



1954

*Dr. Soper upon his reelection as Director
of the Bureau for a third term.*



1959

*Dr. Soper receiving a special copy of the
XV Pan American Sanitary
Conference resolution which gave him the
title of Director Emeritus.*



1959

*Dr. Soper and his wife on
the occasion of
his retirement as
Director of the Bureau.*

works in medical and public health journals throughout the world. His book *Building the Health Bridge*, which appeared in 1970, reflects a true work of human solidarity, and his last undertaking, *The History of Public Health in Latin America*, to be published posthumously, will constitute a testament of inestimable value of which the people of the entire world have been and will continue to be the beneficiaries.