

THE PAN AMERICAN SANITARY BUREAU: ITS ORIGIN, DEVELOPMENT AND ACHIEVEMENTS (*Continued*)

There had evolved gradually a method of procedure for the calling and holding of the conferences. The first had been called by the Governing Board of the International Bureau of the American Republic (now Pan American Union), in accordance with a resolution of the 2nd International Conference of American States. The 2nd and 3rd conferences were called through the International Bureau of the American Republics by the Chairman of the International Sanitary Bureau, who also prepared the provisional program for the meetings. After that, joint invitations were sent by the Government of the country where the Conference met and the Chairman of the Washington Bureau. At the 5th Conference, a set of rules of procedure for the sessions came into operation.

The 5th Conference had opened with noble words from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Chile, Sr. Enrique A. Rodríguez:

The scientific discussions that take place in these Conferences and the exchange of ideas among sanitary representatives, must necessarily wield a positive influence upon the hygienic measures of our Republics. Aside from their undisputed scientific merit, these meetings also realize a generous international work, free from the conventional forms of the Foreign Offices. The intercourse amongst superior men who contribute efficiently towards the direction of the intellectuality of the peoples of America, assures and strengthens fraternal sentiments; it creates special ties of friendship which concur in the realization of the ideals of peace and harmony that might tend to constitute their highest aspiration. It enables them to become familiar with each other, the social structures, the mechanism of public institutions, economic forces, and industrial, scientific and literary progress, and, in a word, everything that constitutes civilization and progress, and that characterizes the importance of these forces in the New World.

This sentiment had been echoed by the heads of various delegations, including that of the Argentine, Dr. Gregorio Araoz Alfaro:

By initiating this series of sanitary conferences, the United States proved that that great nation is not only zealous for its own material and moral progress, but also for the advancement of the whole American Continent, and it is only fitting that we should now pay that country the homage of our gratitude for having placed under its patronage this international and permanent work.

and that of Brazil:

These Conferences, happily initiated by the United States Government in Washington in 1902 and 1905, continued in Mexico in 1907 and in San José de Costa Rica in 1909-10, and now in Chile, assemble the hygienists of North, Central and South Americas to study the protection and prolongation of human life, by means of the supreme eternal and superhuman effort of medicine for the purpose of averting death and desolation. These Conferences enliven and

stimulate men of science in that intellectual transfusion among men devoted to the same labors and researches, collaborating in the great task of conciliating the spirit of friendship among peoples, in that necessary and progressive international American fraternization.

The Conference also ended on a high note.

The head of the Brazilian Delegation, Dr. da Rocha, pointed out that the American eagle bears the motto *E Pluribus Unum*, meaning "one out of many," which in a larger sense can be applied to science, to progress, to hope, and to the defense of national honor. He also emphasized the happy selection of Montevideo as the seat for the next Conference, since Uruguay was the country having the smallest death rate (15 per 1,000) in the Americas, one of whose prominent medical statesmen, Soca, had said: "Nations must learn or die."

The President of the conference, Dr. Alejandro Del Río, closed the sessions stating:

I do not believe that I exaggerate when I say that, on account of the number of nations here represented, and of the importance of its resolutions, this Conference has proved no less valuable than the preceding ones, and that it marks a positive progress in the history of these periodical meetings which are so beneficial for the sanitary betterment and the moral and material prosperity of the American Republics.

6th Conference.—The I World War which so dangerously shook the foundations of civilization could not fail to make its impact felt in the inter-American health field. The 6th Pan American Sanitary Conference, first planned for 1915, had to be postponed, and actually nine years elapsed between the 5th and 6th Conferences.

A number of unforeseen situations had developed between the two meetings. The President elected for the Pan American Sanitary Bureau at the 5th Conference, Dr. Walter Wyman, the condition of whose health had prevented him from going to Santiago, died only a few days after the conference closed its sessions (November 21, 1911). The other members of the Directing Council appointed Dr. Rupert Blue, the new Surgeon General of the United States Public Health Service, to succeed him. It so happened, that Dr. Blue had completed his term of service as Surgeon General by the time the conference met, and had been replaced in the meanwhile by Dr. Hugh S. Cumming.

When the war ended, the necessary arrangements were promptly completed, and the meeting was finally held at Montevideo, as approved by the 5th Conference, December 20, 1920. The 6th Conference assumed considerable significance in more than one sense. In the first place, it reestablished the broken thread of inter-American relations in the health field. It took the meetings for the first time to the Atlantic portion of South America and thus enlisted more actively the interest of Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay. It also drew new personalities, and

some far-reaching agreements were agreed upon. The Conference had been long needed. A number of new problems loomed on the horizon and quite a series of developments and advances had occurred which came up for discussion and review.

The number of republics represented was 16, and the number of delegates 33 (including 15 from Uruguay), and among the South American group, only Ecuador failed to be represented. The other absent Republics were Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Nicaragua. The unsettled conditions in Mexico caused that country to entrust its representation to an Uruguayan physician.⁵⁶ The Conference lasted from December 12 to 20, 1920. The President was Dr. E. Fernández Espiro, and five secretaries were elected: two from Uruguay, and one each from Argentina, the United States, and Paraguay.⁵⁷

The provisional program included the following subjects: plague, typhus fever, malaria, hookworm disease, cerebrospinal meningitis, poliomyelitis, and lethargic encephalitis, leprosy, syphilis, disinfection methods, maritime quarantine,⁵⁸ water supplies and sewage disposal, vital statistics, and street paving. In addition, and in accordance with previous practice, reports were submitted on recent health legislation and progress and compliance with regulations adopted at previous conferences. New subjects discussed were the poliomyelitis group and influenza, reflecting the recent interest in the matter, also children's diseases, which attracted much attention, and the possible spread of plague by jute bags. The American Delegation laid much stress on typhus fever, pleading for its inclusion in the Washington Convention. This echoed the after-war alarm over the situation in Eastern Europe and the prevalence of the condition in would-be immigrants.

A number of exhaustive reports were presented from various countries, including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Paraguay, Peru, United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Unfortunately, these were left out of the printed transactions, thus destroying a valuable source of information on health conditions at the time.

The number of resolutions adopted established again a new record: 54. They dealt with tuberculosis, collecting statistics on bronchitis, pneumonia, and whooping cough in plateau cities; venereal control including gonorrhoea in venereal campaigns; making drugs used against syphilis duty-free; urging the Pan American Sanitary Bureau to compile and distribute data on malaria control; addition of typhus fever to the diseases listed in the Washington Convention; compulsory reporting of

⁵⁶ El Salvador, Honduras and Panama were represented by lay diplomats.

⁵⁷ There had been two secretaries: one English-speaking and one Spanish-speaking, at the 1st and 4th Conferences; one at the 2nd and the 3rd; 3 (one of the American) at the 5th.

⁵⁸ The inclusion of this subject in the program may seem somewhat strange. However, its relation to urban sanitation and mosquito breeding explains the action.

communicable diseases; vital statistics; plague; typhoid fever; campaign against disease vectors, including rats, flies, and mosquitoes; intestinal parasites; disease carriers; rat extermination at ports; rat-proofing; seaport sanitation; ships' physicians; creation of sanitary personnel, and health education. Other interesting recommendations were signing of agreements between neighboring countries to handle specific questions; that programs of the Pan American Sanitary Conferences should deal with internal measures mainly when these might be incorporated into national legislation and that the Conferences should meet every two years; improvement of reports to the Pan American Sanitary Bureau; that the delegates should be trained health workers; and making the national health authorities members of the Washington Bureau, through making them members ex-officio of the National Committees of the Bureau.

However, what endowed the Conference with special significance in the history of inter-American health relations was its reorganization of the Washington Bureau and the increase of its maintenance fund to \$20,000 a year; and its recommendations for the preparation of a Pan American Sanitary Code to standardize and bring to date the provisions of the Washington Convention, and to the Washington Bureau to study the publication of a bulletin.

It is interesting to note that the positions of Vice-Director and Honorary Director were created for the first time.

It was unfortunate that at this Conference the old precedent of electing national committees to collaborate with the Pan American Sanitary Bureau should have been abandoned. While these committees had so far and to a large extent been ineffective, they had served as one more tie joining the general medical profession to health activities and incidentally establishing in each country a goodwill focus holding much promise for the future.

New personalities coming to the fore at the Conference were Dr. Hugh S. Cumming, who was elected Director; Dr. Pablo García Medina, who became the first Director of Honor; J. H. White, who became the first Vice-Director; Dr. M. H. Lebrede; Dr. C. E. Paz Soldán, and Dr. J. F. González.

The change in personnel was evidenced in the tributes rendered in the opening session to delegates at previous meetings who had passed away, Wyman, Vicencio, Oswaldo Cruz, Liceaga, R. Del Río, J. B. Miranda and Enrique Deformes. A pleasant aside was the greetings to a sanitarian still living: the Argentine Coni.

A touching inter-American note was given at the closing session by one of the Argentine delegates, Dr. G. N. Martínez:

I wish to refer to our elder sister, ahead of us in extent, population, culture, and progress: the United States of America. As a citizen of a nation which possibly has never been influenced by international or foreign suggestions, I feel I am freely qualified to propose without insincerity or flattery, which are far away from our mind, on behalf of the Argentine delegation, a warm applause for the sanitary organization of the United States. It constitutes the advance sentinel watching over the health of our continent, either through its own selfish vitality or through the strength irradiated by all organisms in full growth and increase, this organization has extended its watchful activity, its preventive and curative action over many points in the American Continent which are enjoying its benefits. Because of all these facts, I feel I interpret the sentiments of our country, in requesting a warm vote of applause for the official health organization and private health institutions of the United States of America.

7th Conference.—While the VI Conference recommended biennial conferences the call for the seventh conference was not issued until Sept. 18, 1923, and the meeting did not take place until Nov. 5–16, 1924 at Habana. Dr. Mario G. Lebrede was elected President, Dr. Francisco Ma. Fernández, Secretary General.⁵⁹ Delegates numbered 30 and the countries represented again 18, only Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua being absent. Costa Rica, Guatemala and Honduras were, however, represented by prominent Cuban physicians, and Colombia by its Consul at Habana, a physician.

The program was the longest on record, but all the subjects had been recommended either by the VI American States, including tuberculosis, pneumonia and whooping cough, duty-free products against syphilis, malaria, compulsory reporting of communicable diseases, vital statistics, venereal diseases, leprosy, industrial hygiene, fly control, intestinal parasites, maritime quarantine, disease carriers, and drafting of a standard law on food and drug control. Two things make this meeting outstanding: the change in name from International to Pan-American, both for the Bureau and the Conferences, as recommended by the V International Conference of American States, and especially the discussion and adoption of the Pan American Sanitary Code, this being an action recommended by the 6th Conference.

The by-laws governing the Conference were the most complete to that time. The Secretary of State of Cuba, in his opening address reviewed the history of Pan American cooperation and ended stating:

The atmosphere of peace and quiet investigation, of humanitarian foresight, and of noble scientific emulation which prevails in these Congresses, renders ever more repugnant the smell of powder, the wages of war, the fatal effects of ignorance and brutal rivalry which, from whatever angle they may be viewed, have no longer any place or reason of being in a society ruled by the Christian doctrine, illuminated by the genius of an Edison and a Marconi, and fortified by the teachings of the great benefactors of humanity, from Hippocrates to Pasteur, whose

⁵⁹ Assistant secretaries were appointed: two from Spanish-speaking countries, 1 from Brazil 1 from the United States.

endeavors, abnegation, and self sacrifice are healing the ailments of the inhabitants of the earth, as it rolls onward in the infinite toward those far-away and unknown regions where worlds are dissolved and born again in the ether of immortality. In the order of purely material things, a noted scientist once exclaimed—and after all he was more or less right—that however closely he had searched, he had never found the human soul under his lancet. But it would be difficult to maintain that the American soul does not dwell in the mysterious currents of life and sympathy which ebb and flow with a generous impulse in these Conferences. In them a beautiful reality has come into being: the harmony of the American people to serve practically, an ideal which we all are seeking: the improvement of the community and of the individual through the efforts of all and everyone. The glory, the honor, the prosperity, and even the power of the State are concepts which cannot be separated from the idea of international responsibility, whose ripe fruit is the cooperation of nations, which in its turn implies the fulfillment of the most lofty duties.

In his turn, the President of the Conference, Dr. Lebrede, recalled the important duty the meeting was to perform:

This Conference is no doubt destined to be fruitful in practical results, and to reflect that one of the most important subjects—if not the most important of all—to be considered and approved is the Sanitary Maritime Code, which is to take the place of the sanitary precepts by which we have been governed since the year 1905, in point of fact, the first Pan American Sanitary Code, adopted at the Second International Conference held in Washington and ratified later by the governments of fourteen of the Republics represented at that Conference.

Experienced men from previous conferences attended; Gurgel, González, Aráoz Alfaro, Llambías, Paz Soldán, Gubetich. New men making their debut at these assemblies were Pruneda, Cumming, Long, Roberts, Ramos. One interesting innovation was the presence of a representative of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau and an observer of the League of Nations.

The number of resolutions adopted was 29, dealing with the following subjects: campaign against alcoholism; establishment of schools of public health; carrying out child welfare campaigns and State supervision over childhood; enactment of standard food and drug laws; provision of safe water supplies for cities and towns and disinfection with chlorine; intensifying of typhoid control; abandonment of terminal disinfection; repression of quack patent medicines; definition of venereal prophylaxis; promotion of family life and increase; study of disinfection of disease carriers; measures against schistosomes; continued study of tuberculosis control; development of quinine manufacture; continuing the study of leprosy control and treatment; continuation of study of fly control measures and intensification of campaigns against intestinal parasites.

(To be continued)