

## THE NEXT LEPROSY CONGRESS

TO THE EDITOR:

Many, perhaps the majority, of those present at the Havana Congress would, to a certain extent, agree with the comments of Dr. Davison and Dr. Lowe [THE JOURNAL 17 (1949) 118]. Both of them have used the word "conference," but the meeting at Havana was not a conference but a "congress." A congress is a meeting together of designated representatives, in this case chosen by the governments of most of the States in the world. A conference is an appointed meeting for instruction or discussion. From the purely scientific point of view no doubt the latter form of meeting would be the more profitable.

In arranging the Havana Congress the first initiative was taken by the International Leprosy Association. When, however, an invitation had been extended by the Government of Cuba and accepted, the chief responsibility for making the arrangements for the meeting was in the hands of the local committee appointed by that government.

True, there was constant correspondence between the local committee and the office of the I. L. A. in London, but it was only a few days before the beginning of the Congress that the President and General Secretary of the Association were able to arrive in Cuba and meet with the local committee in organizing the scientific sessions.

Those hoping to attend the Congress had been asked to send in their names and the titles and abstracts of their papers two or three months beforehand, but several of the more important papers were intimated only a day or two before the Congress began—and some of them after that. Indeed, many of the South American delegates did not know whether or not they would be sent by their governments until a few days before the opening session, and this was not for want of timely notification. In consequence, before the registration day the organizing group was unable to get anything like an accurate idea of the number of delegates who would attend or of the number of papers they would wish to present. Actually, for some time it seemed possible that there might be a scarcity of papers, whereas actually a superabundance of them was presented even under the limiting rules adopted.

Another difficulty lay in the question of who was responsible for the conduct of the meeting, and especially for accepting and scheduling of papers. Was it the representatives of I. L. A., or the local committee, or the Congress in session, or a committee to

be appointed by it? Actually, the local organizers delegated this work to the I. L. A. representatives. Later, a small but resolute number of the delegates held that the selection of the papers and the setting up of the program could properly be done only by the Congress itself, and it was only after long hours of reasoning that they admitted that, though the Congress in session had actual power to sanction or reject the program or any papers put forward (as of course could not be questioned), chaos could be averted only by the main arrangements being made before the opening session.

That such difficulties are common to other international organizations is shown by the recent action taken by UNESCO and WHO in sponsoring the formation of the Medical Congress Council [THE JOURNAL 17 (1949) 103]. This Council "will study congress techniques, many of which have been worked out in recent years, and will be in a position to give valuable advice." The International Leprosy Association, itself one of the founder members of this Council, will certainly avail itself of this advice, and of any other help the Council can give before the next international leprosy congress, which is scheduled to be held in 1953.

Meanwhile, one of the best ways to make that congress a success is for groups of workers in many countries to get together and study the important questions which were before the Havana Congress, so as to be able to bring their mature findings to the 1953 meeting. It would also be an advantage if each such group should, as far as possible, allot to one of their representatives (or to one for each subject) the responsibility of putting forward their conclusions. In this way the papers to be read would be reduced to a manageable number and would carry the weight not only of the writers alone but also of their groups.

The Secretary of the International Leprosy Association is at present in India, but he hopes next year (1951) to visit Spain and get in touch with the local congress committee, so that arrangements may be put in train in good time.

*Purulia Leper Home and Hospital*

*Purulia, Bihar, India*

E. MUIR

*General Secretary & Treasurer  
International Leprosy Association*