

## CORRESPONDENCE

*This department is provided for the publication of informal communications which are of interest, whether because they are informative or are suggestive and stimulating, and to serve as an open forum for discussions of matters of interest to leprosy workers.*

To the EDITOR:

It is desired to offer a suggestion on the approach to the leprosy problem in countries in which it has yet to be approached.

There are still certain countries, such as Sierra Leone, where no government action has been taken with regard to leprosy. A recent inquiry elicited the reply that no action is considered advisable until funds are found for the establishment of lazarets.

It is justifiable to surmise that, once lazarets are founded, some steps will be taken to limit the freedom of movement of cases of leprosy notified or under treatment.

Now it has been shown that the early effects of such restrictions include a tendency to hide the disease. This tendency, which causes many of our difficulties and delays the final stamping out of the disease, does not arise before such legal action is taken. (The writer refers to Africa, where the disease is not feared. In countries where the disease is a real scourge, the people may ostracise the sufferers, and this may be as effective as a law in causing early leprotic signs to be hidden.)

However, even if such restrictions are finally necessary, some useful steps may be taken in the interval before the lazarets are established. Such steps should be of a nature to (a) encourage the registration of all cases, (b) provide for the examination of their families if possible, and (c) discourage indiscriminate contact of infected with normal persons. Yet this should be done in such a way as to give the impression that the authorities are not severely but kindly disposed to the sufferers.

Two further facts help us to a solution. First, these primitive people are quite well acquainted with leprosy, rarely mistaking it for other diseases. Second, the government taxes are collected either as a hut tax or a poll-tax. Thus in the Belgian Congo a tax is paid

on every wife except the first, to encourage monogamy; it is remitted to fathers of four children by one wife, to increase birth rate, and to cases of trypanosomiasis, blindness, senile decay, etc. This system can thus be adapted to promote progress in ways not available under indirect taxation systems.

It is therefore proposed that tax should be remitted in the case of any hut occupied solely by a leper or lepers, subject to the certificate where this is practicable that the families have been examined. This would serve all the desiderata above outlined.

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