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EDITORIAL

The mentally handicapped, the mentally retarded, the mentally subnormal, the mentally defective, the mentally backward, the mentally . . . a multitude of designations used by a multitude of workers who mean exactly the same person but cannot agree among themselves what to call him. One wonders whether this is a sign of uncertainty, of an absence of direction, of an inability to decide, of a lack of conviction . . . or the outcome of a healthy change in accepted traditions, beliefs and practices and thus an indication of an imminent revolution in a field which has been stagnant for many, many years. Probably it is both: change there is — no doubt of that — and uncertainty too; many people are willing to do something but are not quite sure where to start and in what direction to push.

There has seldom been so much international public activity in Mental Deficiency — to give it its traditional and most widely known name — as just now. Last year we had the Conference on the Scientific Study of Mental Deficiency in London, this year the Second International Congress on Mental Retardation in Vienna and the First European Congress on the Education, Training and Employment of the Mentally Handicapped in London. Each of these three congresses represented a different approach to the common problem and it is instructive to compare the tendencies shown by analysing their structure.

The London Conference of 1960 has already been discussed in a previous Editorial. It was then pointed out that about two thirds of the papers dealt with diagnosis, etiology and measurement and only a quarter of the remaining programme was primarily concerned with treatment and training. The main criticism made then was that the Conference reflected only too truly the fact that far too little time and energy is spent on research dealing with the problems of treatment and disposal and failed therefore in drawing the attention of potential newcomers to the field, who feel generally that "there is nothing one can do about it."

On the other hand, the London Conference made a brave and very successful effort to bring together the many professional disciplines which make contributions to the manifold problems of prevention, diagnosis, treatment and training. The undeniable success of the Conference which "went with a swing" was largely due to this multidisciplinary approach which gave every worker something of interest whilst he himself contributed a slightly new viewpoint, a new approach, a new thought to the views of other disciplines.

The Second International Congress in Vienna was of a different kind altogether. It was quite clear that the continental approach, represented by the Viennese contributions, was far more narrow in concept than either the British or American idea of the field of Mental Deficiency. This was even expressed in the German title "II. Internationaler Kongress über psychische Entwicklungsstörungen im Kindesalter," which limited the subject-matter of the Congress to childhood problems and explained the strong pediatric leaning of the Congress. The inaccurate English translation "International Congress on Mental Retardation" paid only lip-service to the Anglo-Saxon approach, because the pediatric contributions seemed to have

ousted every other discipline. No effort seemed to have been made to interest other professional workers, and indeed the Congress was very pointedly announced as a "Medical Congress." Of the over 100 papers read at the Congress scarcely ten per cent dealt with questions of treatment and training.

Whilst one can obviously not take exception to making a congress narrow in approach, it is doubtful whether a "Congress on Mental Retardation" should be treated as if it were the domain of one discipline alone. Handing over the discussion of a subject to one professional group only, though it is generally recognised that others have a legitimate interest in it and have a valid contribution to make, could easily be interpreted as an attempt at "closed shop" and setting the clock back. It appears fortunate that this danger has been recognised by some, and strenuous efforts are made now to reconcile the views of the "Vienna" group with those of the "London" group. It can be confidentially hoped that the next International Congress, planned for 1964 in Copenhagen, will not be a successor to the onesided Congress in Vienna, but will carry on with the ideas of the multidisciplinary London Conference.

The "European Congress" in London was organised by the European League of Societies for the Mentally Handicapped; in other words by those with a direct vested interest — the parents themselves. Compared with the two other Congresses it was modest in its aim. Scarcely more than a dozen addresses were given during the first three days—a pleasant change from the overcrowded scientific congresses—and none of them aimed at giving the fruits of some particular research work to a non-professional audience. The addresses, kept in general terms, were of a popular and informative character and were obviously meant to assure the listening representatives of the parents that something was "moving at last." It was, however, interesting to note what the organisers thought should be emphasised in this Congress as evidently representing the direction which "Education, Training and Employment of the Mentally Handicapped" should take in the future. One quarter of the few addresses dealt with the organisation of the Dutch sheltered workshops and during the last two days of the Congress the delegates flew to the Hague to inspect these training arrangements. This bodily removal of the Congress was an imaginative thought, but one wonders whether this wholehearted emphasis of one aspect is firstly not prejudging the whole situation which has at last become fluid, and secondly whether one has to go so far afield to see industrial work carried out by subnormals. Some years ago, the Dutch workshops were an important and inspiring example of what could be done, but nowadays, development has been rapid in many places and quite comparable with the actual work in Holland, even if the organisation may be rather different. It appears that — as far as the National Society for Mentally Handicapped Children is concerned which was responsible for the organisation of the Congress — the Society is still fighting a battle which has already been won and tilting at windmills. The industrial workshop — if that is to be the solution — is here, and will probably mushroom everywhere under local pressure and with Ministry encouragement.

The next year will see other, similar Congresses on a national scale, but this time organised by the teachers. The Guild of Teachers of Backward Children is arranging a conference for April 1962 and the Special Schools' Association has announced a National Conference for August 1962. It is interesting to note that there are two conferences on the same subject in one year, organised by what an outsider would consider the same people. One may wonder whether this duplication of effort is justified and whether a specialist professional body can produce worthwhile papers and addresses twice a year.

At this stage of development it appears necessary to use Congresses and Conferences as a means of **bringing together** specialists from **various** fields, and not to reinforce the demarcation lines of the past which have neither advanced the value of professional contributions nor helped the subnormal.