

## **Around the International Congress on Mental Health**

*A Report by LOUISE HERST, Chicago*

An event of considerable significance took place this summer during the month of August. It was the gathering of approximately 2,000 individuals from fifty-four nations throughout the world, representing their respective fields of sociology, psychology, psychiatry, social service, anthropology, political science, philosophy, theology, and education.

The basic purpose of this meeting, the first of its kind since the outbreak of war, was to attack the problem of world cooperation for an enduring peace from the combined viewpoints of these sciences. Countless hours of work went into the reports and preparations for this World Congress. All groups shared a common belief that world peace depends upon the attitudes reflected in human behavior. Man and his family and school impose their imprint early in the personality development of their members, who in turn tend to perpetuate the traditional pattern in which they have been moulded. It is the men and women in whom these patterns of attitude and behavior have been incorporated who present the immediate resistance to social, economic, and political changes.

It would be the responsibility of these combined sciences to form a program which would effect the changes necessary to allow mankind to develop concepts of society which would embrace the philosophy of world citizenship, implying loyalty to the whole of mankind.

The program to result from this huge gathering of scientists would include outlines of acceptable principles, practices, and professional ethics for all those working in the field of mental health and human relations.

Unfortunately, the very handicap confronting all of mankind arose within the Congress itself. It created a problem that all persons who work within the realm of these sciences must realize; it must be overcome before any positive program can be presented to the multitude of communities requiring the wholesome program of mental health. The spirit of world citizenship was present during the sessions of the Congress only in a social sense. The personal relationships of the representatives were of a very high level of acceptance. The handicaps of differences in culture and languages were overcome in the numerous informal gatherings skillfully arranged by the Congress organizers who recognized the need for interchange of problems of common and divergent natures.

But, within the formal plenary sessions, there was a noticeable and deplorable lack of the spirit of mutual acceptance which the Congress should have exemplified. Acceptance of the divergent schools of thought, all of which certainly have made invaluable contributions to the represented sciences, was almost totally lacking. In view of this fact, the Congress could be considered a failure. The inability of the organizers to admit the representatives of all the various philosophies differing from their own to be heard and their work discussed constituted a seeming lack of belief in the task which they had undertaken.

Certainly it revealed the need for action among the other groups to enable this World Congress in its future meetings to put forth a workable program for all humanity in the efforts of world peace. In order to achieve even partial success, the representative groups must be prepared to set the examples of unity and open-mindedness.

Of vital interest to all Adlerians was the serious thinking of the representatives of Individual Psychology present at the sessions as to what could be done to avoid and prevent similar situations within the next World Congress, convening in the summer of 1950.

Surely the work of Individual Psychology deserves to be better known and respected by the other members working in the field of mental health and psychiatry. Many of the basic laws of behavior established by Alfred Adler are being plagiarized and adopted by other schools without any thought of acknowledgement. That in itself is not the most important issue at stake. It is the lack of understanding of the principles of Individual Psychology among these other groups, and their attitudes, amounting almost to contempt at times, which seriously hamper the work toward mutual cooperation. This was felt most keenly by the Adlerians who were present at the Congress and who bore the brunt of these attitudes, as there, representatives were prevented from presenting their scientific findings.

Because there is so much in Individual Psychology of benefit to the entire world, and because it fits so completely into the purpose of what is being attempted by the social sciences to alleviate the psychological difficulties of the human race, the representatives of the various Individual Psychology groups held at that time a series of informal conferences in several cities in Europe. It was felt to be an urgent necessity for the Adlerians throughout the world to organize on an international scale in order to gain the recognition and status which would permit active participation in the next World Congress.

With the help of Dr. Lydia Sicher of Los Angeles, Miss Phyllis Bottome and Captain Forbes-Dennis of London, Mrs. Asya Kadis and Mrs. Sophie Lazarsfeld of New York, Dr. Alexander Muller of Amsterdam, and the tireless efforts of Dr. Joshua Bierer of London, a tentative program of suggestions for the organizing of an International Adlerian Society was drawn up. It was further suggested that efforts be made to convene as a World Congress of Adlerians prior to the Mental Health Congress of 1950. Simultaneously, a need for an International Journal of high scientific standards, acceptable to the leading scientific groups and universities throughout the world, was discussed. The same committee set forth tentative plans for such a publication.

Coinciding with the opening of the World Congress was the first attempt in London to revive the Adlerian Society in England. This group had been dissolved since the beginning of the war. The news from this source is most encouraging as there is a fine nucleus of professional people from which to form the core of the organization. Besides the enthusiastic professional group, a recognized institution has been successfully functioning in London for several years, and can be used as a center of activities as part of the new organization. This is the Institute for Social Psychiatry, founded by Dr. Joshua Bierer, a pupil of Alfred Adler, who has achieved recognition and considerable professional

status in England through his contributions to social and group psychotherapy. It was through his awareness of the situation existing within the workings of the Congress and his willingness to help solve the problem that the representatives of the various Individual Psychology groups were able to get together and formulate plans to be presented to all Individual Psychology organizations wherever they may be.

Should the groups of Individual Psychology accomplish the purpose worked out by these representatives within the next two years and achieve the recognition and status necessary to be heard and to participate actively as part of the next World Congress on Mental Health, they will indeed be doing their share in rendering service to the world peace and to all humanity.