

NEW HEALTH FOR ASIA

IN 1946, at the time of UNRRA's liquidation, there were at least thirty million European children, and a greater number in Asia in need of help. The United Nations General Assembly by unanimous vote established the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) as an international co-operative for children. "It was a means," says an official publication, "through which both needy countries and those that had been spared might pool essential supplies for children's aid, and re-distribute those supplies from a common stockpile according to need."

The fund's operations began in Europe in the winter of 1947-48, on an initial contribution of 15,000,000 dollars from the United States Government. In 1949 operations were extended to Asia, where, for a year, Dr. M. H. Watt, formerly Director General of Health in Wellington, administered the fund in a collection of territories with a total population of six hundred million people. He had to spread a sum of 9,300,000 dollars (with a further prospect of about 2,000,000 dollars) over Pakistan, India, Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Indo-

China, the Philippines, Indonesia, and the British Colonies of Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo, Brunei, and Sarawak.

Dr. Watt, who has just returned to New Zealand, had his headquarters in Manila for three months, and then shifted to Bangkok, the capital of Thailand, geographically about the centre of the territories he had to administer. His deputy was Ralph Goodman, of Auckland, one of the many Naval Reservists captured by the Japanese in Hong Kong—and one of the very few who escaped. Two World Health Organisation doctors were originally attached to the Bangkok Headquarters; a pediatrician, a Scots-woman, and a French malarologist. A third, Dr. Cottrell, of Dunedin, who has established a very fine reputation for his work in connection with refugees in the Middle East, has just joined the staff. On the business side, Dr. Watt was assisted by a Dutch Finance Officer, an American Administration Officer, and by another New Zealander, Don Watkins (an ex-student of Victoria University College) as Supply Officer. Two Australian girl secretaries completed the occidental representation, and the rest of the Headquarters staff was made up of Thai nationals. Four smaller missions were established in other key parts of

the territory. Miss Elsie Moyle, of Auckland, for a short time did good service as Mission Chief in Manila.

It was obvious, Dr. Watt told *The Listener*, that with the funds and food available to UNICEF, nothing much could be done about feeding all those who were undernourished. So instead of providing relief in the way of food, UNICEF helped the countries in the territory to build up their public health services and teaching facilities, with special emphasis on maternal and child health.

Three Major Problems

A UNICEF Mission having been invited to help, would ask a national government to provide an estimate of its needs. This estimate would be submitted to UNICEF and the World Health Organisation, and, if approved by these bodies a plan of operations would be prepared. Then the national government would be asked to match the assistance given from outside by providing buildings, local staff, transport, locally available equipment, and money for the board and travel expenses of UNICEF Officials.

Co-operation established, an attack would be made on the three major public health problems of the Far East;

malaria, tuberculosis, and yaws. The attack against malaria is developed in rural areas, by spraying the inside of every house with DDT. After such treatment the incidence of malaria has gone down considerably in the districts visited.

A start is being made with the provision of X-ray and laboratory facilities for the diagnosis of tuberculosis, and public health nurses are being trained to supervise contacts, and keep an eye on patients who are being treated in their own homes. The disease is widely established, and there are not sufficient hospital beds for the treatment of even the worst cases. In an endeavour to increase the people's resistance to tuberculosis, one million dollars has been set aside for mass vaccination with BCG in Pakistan, India, and Ceylon, and further extension is planned.

Yaws is a skin disease common in children and young people. It has been found that the organism is particularly susceptible to penicillin therapy, and a campaign with penicillin is at present being planned in Indonesia, where the breakdown of medical services due to war devastation has led to an increase in the incidence of the disease.

New Zealand Can Help

UNICEF is making great efforts to provide nationals of Far Eastern countries with at least basic training in maternal and child health. For this purpose it proposes to spend considerable

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