

## JUBILEE

# National Institute of Public Health, Prague

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The National Institute of Public Health was officially inaugurated by the Minister of Public Health and Physical Education on November 5, 1925.

This year is thus a jubilee year, as 70 years have elapsed since its foundation. In the first issue of our Central European Journal of Public Health (Vol. 1, No. 1, 1993) we recalled this event and published a few photographs taken then. More detailed information along with data on the historical activities and prerequisites of the development of public health were published later (Vol. 2, No. 1, 1994).

In the present jubilee issue we should like to mention some more circumstances associated with the history, life and work of the National Institute of Public Health.

After establishing "physicians" who as "physici regni" or "magistri sanitatis" (1585) acted as predecessors of contemporary hygienists, their activities had rather the character of a sanitary police (Pelc, 1892). In the foreground of all these efforts in the sphere of public health an important part was always played by military health services. In ordinary life, however, this system was not very effective.

With the advances of natural sciences, in particular bacteriology, institutes attached to medical schools developed which assisted the health administration. An important institute of this type was Pettenkoffer's Institute in Germany which had a major impact on the development of hygiene as a science practically on the entire European continent.

The name of R. Koch is associated with another institute in Berlin (Reichsgesundheitsamt). New institutes were founded also in other countries: the Institut Pasteur in Paris, the Lister Institute in London etc.

In the Austro-Hungarian monarchy the need of a professional background for the repressive health services system was also obvious. Proposals for the establishment of analogous institutes as in Germany, France, England, however, did not succeed. The role of a professional background for the state health administration was therefore taken over by the newly established institutes of the medical faculties. At the turn of the century several institutes for the investigation of foodstuffs developed as well.

After the foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918 it was necessary to create a central health institute as the initial years of the independent state were associated with the necessity to resolve serious health and social problems. The new Ministry of Public Health and Physical Education alone was unable to find an effective and rapid solution of this situation. The first assistance came again from the universities (e. g. the Pasteur Institute for Bacteriology and Serology of Charles University). Financial means for a more expensive solution were not available. Therefore the offer of the International Health Office of the Rockefeller Foundation was accepted and thanks to contacts of Minister V. Šrobár and wife of the 1st president Mrs Alice Masaryk the necessary discussions were started.

In the USA at that time schools of hygiene and public health developed where epidemiology, hygiene, sanitary engineering and public health administration were taught. In the first half

of the twenties, 29 Czechoslovak doctors won the necessary Rockefeller scholarship, the majority became later leading workers of the future National Institute of Public Health.

Ideas on the role of the future scientific and professional organ of the Ministry of Public Health were very controversial. The main issue was how to use possible assistance from abroad.

One of the suggestions was to establish people's health institutes at a district or municipal level with welfare clinics and dispensaries which would deal with social medicine. Another proposal enforced the idea of laboratory facilities to support the infectious diseases control.

In January 1920 the parliament entrusted the Government to found the National Institute of Public Health. To this end a special commission was created which recommended to establish three testing state institutes, three production institutes and a network of bacteriological – diagnostic stations and other "epidemiological" facilities.

The representative of the International Health Office, F. F. Russell, suggested to build a "Public Health Institute" as a new, predominantly laboratory section of the Ministry and not an institution which would deal purely with administrative and organizational matters, as was the intention of some of the workers at the Ministry.

The official contract between the Czechoslovak Ministry of Public Health and Physical Education and the Rockefeller Foundation was signed on August 25, 1921.

A building site for the Institute was selected. The grounds in the vicinity of the Vinohrady Hospital were procured by the Ministry in September 1921.

In November 1921 at the Ministry an "Executive office for building of the National Institute of Public Health (NIPH)" was set up. At the same time an "Advisory Board for establishing the NIPH was formed comprising above all professors from medical faculties.

According to the proposal of one of the prominent scientist prof. Kučera the Institute was to become a practical, specialized part of the Ministry of Public Health and Physical Education with the following tasks:

- help to resolve on a scientific basis the needs of public health,
- engage in scientific research,
- train medical and other professionals for the public health service, incl. doctors who should become (after passing a special examination) executive authorities of the hygiene service.

Enforcement of the concept of the NIPH was not unequivocal. University professors were opposed to the scientific and training function of the institute and wanted to enhance its research component. The American adviser, Prof. Gunn, wanted purely experimental work to be done at the universities or private institutes, while the NIPH was to concentrate on the function of a state-backed epidemiological laboratory service.

After revisions of the organizational pattern of the Institute eleven departments were foreseen. The first four were to form the "serum vaccine" part of the institute concerned with the

control of infectious diseases, the other department was concerned with laboratory work in hygiene.

Construction work started at the end of 1922 and by the time of the inauguration in November 1925 sixteen of the designed 19 buildings were finished; for raising horses and breeding laboratory animals a farm, by Prague on the Elbe river, was purchased and adapted.

Most of these historical data are from the publication by D. Niklíček (1977) where they are given in more detail.

The first stage of construction and controversies on the NIPH was terminated on October 12, 1925 when the Parliament adopted the act on the establishment, activities and organization structure of the National Institute of Public Health of the Czechoslovak Republic (Legal code No. 218) where we find in paragraph 2 that "it is the task of the Institute to implement for the state health administration professional scientific work and research needed for effective health measures; to promote training in preventive medicine and to take care of practical specialized training of health professionals". The law foresaw that any department can have branches attached to provincial universities. The law was signed by President T. G. Masaryk. Prof. P. Kučera was appointed as the first director of the NIPH and the NIPH was solemnly inaugurated on November 5, 1925. The basic project was completed at the beginning of the thirties. Different parts of the Institute started to operate gradually, as soon as the construction work finished.

The National Institute of Public Health

- produced sera and vaccines,
- started extensive scientific research in the field of public health; the principle that every worker must attempt to contribute in addition to his routine work to scientific advancement was enforced,
- it participated in the development of bacteriological diagnostic services, drug and food control,
- the social hygiene department was concerned with epidemiology, food hygiene, school hygiene, industrial hygiene etc.

Thus an expedient counterbalance was created against repressive thinking of some representatives of hygiene and so-called public health.

The first therapeutic serum department representatives marketed the first antidiphtheria and antitetanus sera in 1926.

Along with production, research proceeded and new productions were started.

On April 11, 1928 the first director, Prof. K. Kučera, died. Ass. Prof. MUDr. B. Vacek, his former deputy, was nominated as successor.

On the initiative of Dr. Feierabend NIPH News started to be published and were provided free of charge to all medical journals. Fifty-three issues of these News were published and the journal was abolished during the German occupation. Laboratory procedures and methodical instructions reflecting the needs of public health services and the epidemiological situation in particular were published in NIPH News. Between 1930–1939 a journal in French "Travaux de l'Institut d'Hygiène Publique de l'Etat Tchécoslovaque" was published as well.

On July 4, 1933 Dr. Feierabend, head of the first department with all his family met a tragic death in the Alps. His department was taken over by Ass. Prof. F. Vaníček. In 1937 the second director of the NIPH Ass. Prof. B. Vacek retired.

The third director of the NIPH from February 2, 1938 was Dr. H. Pelc. He was an excellent director because of his encyclopaedic knowledge and experience as well as for his extensive scientific and organizational contacts, functions and

abilities. In 1938 the immunobiological production of the institute reached its peak, and with regard to the international situation, reserve, duplicate production was started in Turčanský Svätý Martin in Slovakia.

March 15, 1939 was the end of Czechoslovakia and thus also the end of the National Institute of Public Health. The "Health Institute of the Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia" was established. The director, Prof. H. Pelc, was made to retire and a German administration was installed. There was a considerable movement of workers (Slovak and Jewish employees left, while there were new employees from the occupied borderlands and also soldiers etc.).

After a certain anarchy, at the beginning of 1941 the Institute was entrusted to Dr. Pesch, professor of hygiene from Köln on the Rhine. He died, however, soon.

He was succeeded by a Sudeten German, Ass. Prof. Dr. Otto Schubert, formerly head of the department of biological control in the NIPH. German was introduced as the official language. Orders on behalf of the army increased in frequency and there was a latent battle to preserve the departments whose existence was threatened by army demands (dysenteric bacteriophage, antigangrenous serum etc.).

In 1942 a veterinary department was opened with laboratories for the examination of meat and milk. To the Institute a number of workers was appointed without proper selection; there were informers in the Institute, corrupted and dishonest people of all kinds. The Institute paid a heavy toll for this state of affairs. After the assassination of Heydrich (July 2, 1942) several workers were executed: Prof. H. Pelc (the last director of the NIPH before the Nazi occupation), Ass. Prof. V. Strimpeš, Dr. J. Bouček, Dr. J. Klíma.

Even under the complicated wartime conditions attempts were made to maintain all necessary activities at a high professional level.

At the end of the war a supply of anti-tetanus and anti-gangrene serum was available which was distributed to health workers already on May 5, 1945. In the Institute the production of blood preserves for the wounded was rapidly organized. All these activities took place under the leadership of Ass. Prof. Dr. F. Vaníček. A mobile group headed by K. Raška went to Terezín Concentration Camp etc.

In May 1945 Prof. V. Hons became the first post-war director of the Institute. He was a nutritionist and physiologist. Ass. Prof. Vaníček one of the senior members of the Institute resumed publication of NIPH News. News No. 55 provided the first information on the health status of the population after the occupation. Ass. Prof. Vaníček together with Dr. Unger, Dr. Ivan Málek, Dr. Doubrava organized the UNRRA penicillin campaign after May 26, 1945.

During the post-war period by various tendencies to make some departments independent units came to the light. Subsequently on January 1, 1949 the immunobiological production was separated and a State Institute for Production of Sera was created. From this Institute the national enterprise Biogena developed in 1950. Further in 1953 the Immunological Research Institute was founded which later became part of the newly founded Institute for Sera and Vaccines. In Šarišské Michalany a twin institute Imuna was built.

Act No. 70 of February 23, 1949 changed the institute which for a brief time bore the name of "National Institute of Public Health and Social Affairs" into the National Institute of Public Health. The latter, being part of the state health administration, was engaged in professional, scientific, control, research and other activities in the sphere of health services needed for the management and supervision of the health policy.

According to the statute valid at the time the Institute had five sections with the appropriate departments and laboratories:

- Section I for research on and Supervision of the environment (Prof. MUDr. M. Kredba).
- Section II for nutrition research, food control and control of objects of everyday use (Prof. MUDr. V. Hons – director of NIPH).
- Section III for microbiology and epidemiology (Ass. Prof. MUDr. K. Raška).
- Section IV for the investigation of drugs (Prof. Dr. E. Skarnitzel).
- Section V for health education and training (Dr. M. K. Fügnerová).

The Institute had at that time ten branches: in Prague 1, Prague 2, České Budějovice, Ústí nad Labem, Karlovy Vary, Hradec Králové, Brno, Písek, Ostrava and Uherské Hradiště.

In 1952 the IVth section became independent as the State Institute for Drug Control.

Thus from the remaining parts of the NIPH in 1952 several separate institutes developed: Institute of Hygiene, Institute of Industrial Hygiene and Occupational Diseases from which later the Research Institute of Radiation Hygiene separated, Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology. These institutes had their directors and all were looked after by the second technical and economic administration of institutes subordinated to the Ministry of Health. Thus by December 31, 1952 the NIPH ceased to exist and thus also the post of director was abolished. Prof. Hons the former director was transferred in 1953 to the Ministry of Health.

During the post-war period several disciplines developed which hold a significant place in the history of Czechoslovak medical advances. In this context we must mention the name of MUDr. František Gallia. A member of the National Institute of Public Health he was a pioneer of modern virology and discoverer of Central European tick-borne encephalitis. He died in 1950 from a viral laboratory infection.

The work and merits of Professor Karel Raška were mentioned in an article dealing with the history and development of public health in Bohemia (Cent. eur. J. publ. Hlth, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1994); the role of workers of the Institute and the advances achieved in the area of poliomyelitis is the subject of a series of papers by Slonim et al. (Cent. eur. J. publ. Hlth, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1993; Vol. 2, No. 2, 1994; Vol. 3, No. 3, 1995) etc. More publications on the results of work of the National Institute of Public Health are being prepared.

The foundation of the Institute of Industrial Hygiene and Occupational Diseases was appreciation of the pioneer work of Prof. Dr. J. Teisinger, the founder of this discipline in Czechoslovakia in the thirties. Under his guidance it became possible to implement his concept of mutually interrelated clinical and experimental work and the work of chemists, biochemists and technologists in the field of research and application of its results in practice.

Independent institutes existed till 1971 when the above mentioned institutes were integrated into the Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology (IHE) to which the microbiological and epidemiological group of the Institute of Tuberculosis and Respiratory Diseases was attached. After integration Prof. F. Janda was appointed director of the Institute. In 1980 he was succeeded by academician B. Rosický. In January 1990 the leadership of the Institute was entrusted to his deputy

Prof. MUDr. B. Ticháček, DrSc., whose directorship was later confirmed by a public contest.

A busy period started; it was necessary to enforce gradually democratic trends in the management of the Institute, officials at the ministries changed, the transformation of the health services and hygiene service was being prepared etc.

In this process it was deemed necessary to restore under the new circumstances the traditions of the original National Institute of Public Health and to develop it in keeping with the needs and possibilities of the transformed health services. It proved possible to justify these efforts, to enforce and prepare its restoration.

We succeeded in our efforts and since January 1, 1992 the National Institute of Public Health exists again.

Immediately organizational and functional changes were initiated, meeting contemporary needs and possibilities, consistent with the reform of the health services. Enforcement of some intentions pertaining to the basic position and mission of the Institute was not an easy task because the basic legislative background was still lacking.

In 1992–1994 the activities of the NIPH were concentrated in five principal centres:

1. Centre for Health and Living Conditions.
2. Centre for Hygiene of Work and Occupational Diseases.
3. Centre of Epidemiology and Microbiology.
4. Centre of Radiation Hygiene.
5. Centre of Hygiene of Food Chains (in Brno).

In addition to these basic departments there are seven collaborating WHO centres in NIPH and 51 national reference laboratories. The Institute has become the residence of the Central Monitoring Network of relations between health and environment. Moreover the Institute has

- a Department of Mathematical Statistics and Programming,
- Library and Department of Scientific Information,
- an Experimental Animal Department.

The NIPH is engaged in teaching activities of the Third Medical Faculty, Charles University, and postgraduate training in the basic disciplines of preventive medicine.

Since 1993 a new international journal is published in English, the Central European Journal of Public Health.

Members of the Institute are engaged in numerous research programmes of local and foreign grant agencies. Participation of the NIPH in the WHO project Concern for Europe's Tomorrow (CET) is also important.

The NIPH acts as an official accreditation centre which via accredited workplaces and intra- and extramural workers participates in the control of laboratory practice in all disciplines of hygiene and microbiology.

On May 1, 1994 the new director, Ass. Prof. J. Kříž, was appointed and Prof. Ticháček retired.

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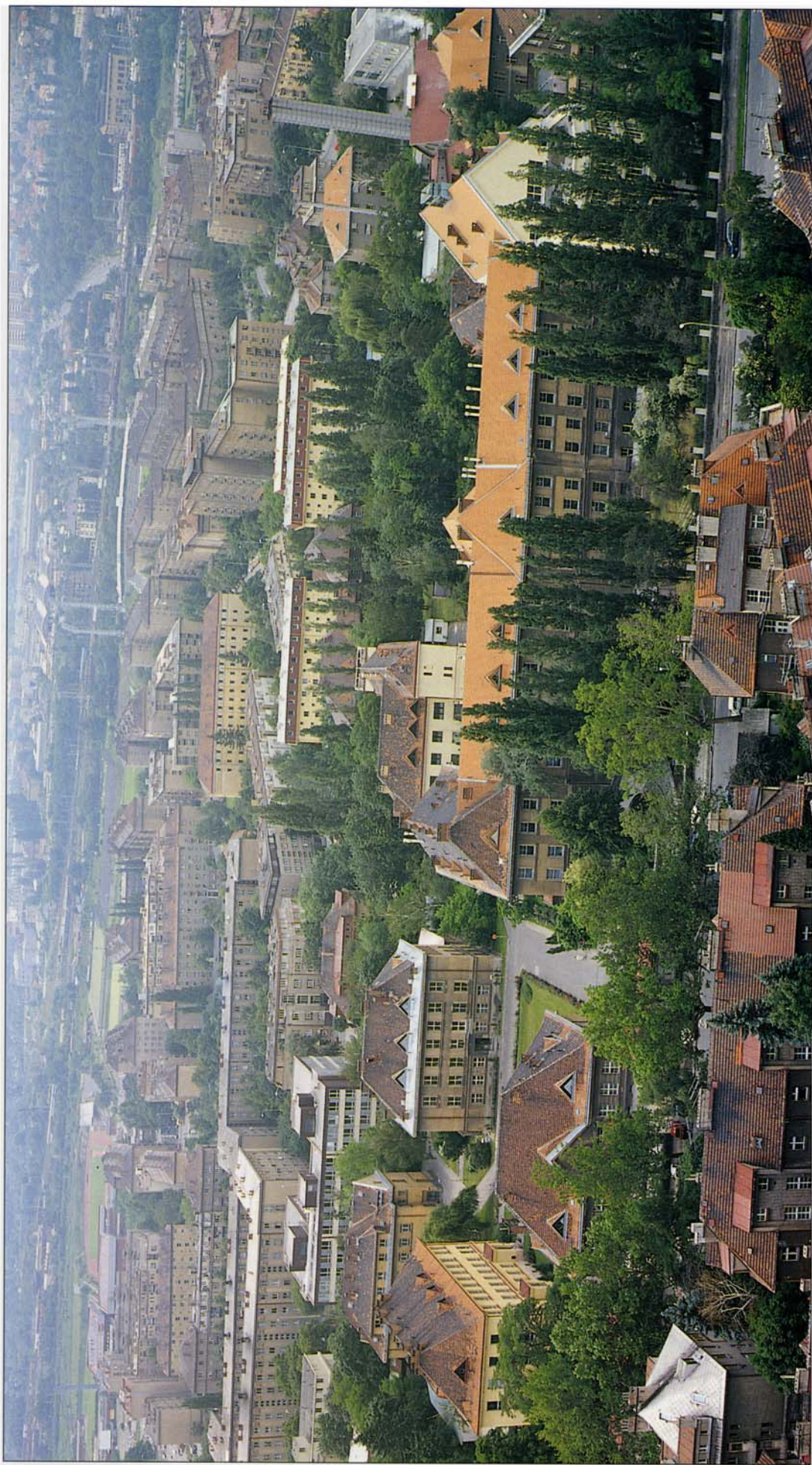
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Minister of Health, M. Bojar, presents the director of the Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology, Prof. B. Ticháček, with the decree on the re-establishment of the National Institute of Public Health.





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