



Finger plethysmograms for hands (R and L) with vibration white finger (2-5): I at room temperature (no anatomical obstacle to blood flow), III after local cooling (complete spasm of finger arteries), II while cooling the opposite hand (no significant spasm mediated by central sympathetic reflex from the other side). (From: Pelnar et al.<sup>1</sup>)

Brammer AJ, Taylor W, eds. *Vibration effects on the hand and arm in industry*. Toronto, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1982:173-87.

## Book review

**The Social History of Occupational Medicine.** Edited by Paul Weindling. (£19.95.) Croom Helm, 1985.

For those, like myself, who were unable to attend the annual provincial meeting of the Society of Occupational Medicine in 1983, this book is very welcome. It contains the papers presented at Portsmouth at a meeting of the Society for the Social History of Medicine which ran at the same time as the annual provincial meeting. A more correct title for the book would have been "Some aspects of recent social

history in occupational health in Germany and the UK". It is not a comprehensive volume but the all-encompassing title can perhaps be forgiven because it is the first publication in this particular field.

The book is divided into four sections, the first of which sets the scene. The second considers particular disorders and their relation with social circumstances and the other parts reflect on compensation and preventive policies. I found the chapters on Cornish tin mining and female TNT workers particularly interesting, not only because of the subject material but also because such wider themes as migration, female role models, and societal attitudes to war were woven in with the basic conflict ideas. Also, though stilted in translation, the German papers were helpful in enabling one to understand why a health and safety system so different from our own had developed in that country.

The overall interpretative analysis applied in most

papers is Marxian which assumes the workplace to be in a state of conflict between capital and labour with governments acting more or less as agents of capital. Many occupational health workers will be irritated by such an analysis which they will know to be both naive and crude. They have the benefit of their own experience of the really much more subtle and complex relations on any shopfloor. The book should not, however, be discounted on these grounds. Given reliance on official records, largely unsupported by shopfloor experience or personal interviews, analysis using some largely theoretical model is inevitable.

Beyond satisfying interest and curiosity, the role of history must be to hold a mirror to our own times and provoke thought on how we should behave in the future. In this respect this is not a comfortable book even though many punches are pulled when compared with contemporary trade union documents. The book should help us to consider with more care the role conflict which is inherent to occupational health, and to ponder with more commitment what exactly we are trying to achieve. This is particularly so for us in the United Kingdom where, if the professions' evidence to the Gregson inquiry is to be believed, we have settled either for venal backbiting or cosy mediocrity.

A J M SLOVAK

## Notices

### **6th International Heavy Metals in the Environment Conference, New Orleans, 15–18 September 1987.**

This conference series will attract worldwide interest from environmental scientists and industrialists,

providing them with an unparalleled opportunity to meet and exchange views on all aspects of metal in the environment, their interaction on other contaminants, and their effects on biota and ecosystems. This year papers have been invited for submission on the main themes of environmental pathways, fate and effects, exposure and health effects, disposal and control strategies and legislation. For further details contact: David Cowan, Technical Media Services, 62 Kelvingrove Street, Glasgow G3 7SA.

### **9th International Colloquium on the Prevention of Occupational Risks due to Electricity, Madrid, 14–16 October 1987.**

The objective of the 9th International Colloquium, which is organised mainly for managers, safety experts, engineers, and physicians, is to inform about the latest knowledge and experiences acquired with regard to the distribution of the tasks in occupational safety and health. The programme furthermore provides the discussion of some special technical and medical problems. The following subjects will be discussed among others: safety at work—an exercise in leadership, means used by the superiors in the control and supervision of work, the tasks of the superiors from a medical point of view, sequelae of electrical accidents and medical postaccident care, safety at work on electrical plant and equipment, especially with regard to work in transformer stations (work on power mains, work on central and subsidiary distributions). For further information contact the secretariat of the section, Berufsgenossenschaft der Feinmechanik und Elektrotechnik, Gustav-Heinemann-Ufer 130, D-5000 Cologne 51, West Germany.