INTRODUCTION

The "work of social peace," as these institutions—both public and private—have been called, deal with prevention and compensation. Throughout the twentieth century they would increase the scope of their actions, their membership would rise, and their focus would become increasingly varied.

For the critics these institutions were inadequate in both their prevention and compensation activities. For the supporters, miracles were being worked. From the end of World War I until the end of the 1960s, a general climate of peace and harmony surrounded the question of accidents in the advanced industrial nations. This climate constitutes a measure of the political success of prevention and compensation institutions. However, the success of the prevention institutions in achieving their stated social goal was less clear: in general terms, excluding wartime or depression hiccups, accident rates declined in the advanced nations from the 1920s until the 1950s, and then stabilized or started rising in some countries until the end of the 1960s.

During the first two thirds of this century, numerous changes, insignificant for some authors and fundamental for others, occurred subsequent to each institution's foundation. As the last third of this century was entered, practices grounded in the nineteenth century, as well as those emerging and seeking dominance for the twenty-first, could be found side by side and frequently in conflict. Beyond this conflict between past and future was another: one that could be called ideological and which manifested itself in contradictory demands, from both internal and external sources, on institutions. Such demands frequently op-
pose profits and safety, in the case of prevention, or profits and adequate indemnification, in the case of compensation.

**Definition of Lines of Research**

Against this background, two general lines of research suggest themselves: to understand the growth of these institutions and to understand the nature of conflict within and between them. This chapter will necessarily concentrate on a part of the picture in order to illuminate professional and state interventions that are crucial for the understanding of the institutions’ past, their current activities, and their future.

**Institutional Interventions**

The notion of “safety and compensation institutions” is used to encompass both public and private sector interventions that take on an organized form. The seeds that produced safety professionals were sown in the beginning of the last century, and some professionals started organizing into associations from the beginning of this century to intervene in the workplace in the name of greater industrial safety and the reduction of the consequences of industrial injury. The private sector and the state provide markets for technicians, doctors, nurses, ergonomists, and others who intervene in the workplace. Academic subdisciplines and disciplines are created and developed to deal with accidents. The term “institution” designates discrete state, insurance, and professional bodies that intervene through their agents in a specialized manner between employer and employee regarding industrial accidents. Such a term is chosen over the relatively undifferentiated term “compensation-safety apparatus,” developed in Berman’s path-finding study, precisely to permit a degree of complexity and internal differentiation to be perceived within diverse areas of activity.¹ Three professions which are considered to represent distinct institutions have been selected for in-depth treatment: safety engineering, industrial medicine, and ergonomics (frequently called human factors engineering in the United States). The selection was made both because of the widely recognized importance of these groups and because of the conflicts their actions reveal; such conflicts appear to be pregnant with consequences for the future management of industrial accidents. Industrial psychology’s role is a more diffuse one and, for this reason, the discipline will be investigated in less depth. In the arena of state action, both compensation and prevention institutions will be examined. To provide broad insights it is important to go beyond a narrow focus on the country for