



## International Civilian Service and Mutual Aid

*By Pierre Ceresole (about 1924)*

In several countries today there is a growing demand for the creation of Civilian Service for conscientious objectors on the lines already adopted in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Holland.\* We would suggest the considerable advantages of close co-operation between the different groups interested in the proposal.

An international movement in favour of Civilian Service would stimulate public interest and government action in each country by definitely informing public opinion upon the measures taken in other countries - it would re-assure those who fear that the development of such a Civilian Service in their own country would bring about disarmament there too greatly in advance of other nations : it would have a still higher aim, that of preparing the way for the employment of such a civilian organisation not only within national frontiers but for international co-operative service.

This would in itself be of great value for it would allow of the defence of each nation - and of all nations - on a new principle, namely by the gradual substitution for the menace and burden of military preparations of the surer and better method of mutual service creative of goodwill among the peoples.

Our desire to see the rise of such an organisation is in harmony with the main lines of a proposal recently presented to the Eleventh Conference of the International Red Cross by Senator Giovanni Ciraiolo, President of the Italian Red Cross, for the creation of an "International Federation for Mutual Assistance in the Relief of Peoples overtaken by Disaster." It should be noted that this proposal is quite independent of the claims of those who refuse military service, and does not even mention them.

Further, during the campaign on behalf of Civilian Service now on foot in Switzerland, Dr. Bolle, a member of the Swiss Parliament and an opponent of Civilian Service on a purely national basis, brought forward a proposal that the services of conscientious objectors of all nations should be placed at the disposal of the League of Nations.

It would only require the combination of these two proposals, formulated independently by two competent authorities, to approximate to the ideal of an international Civilian Service such as we desire.

A third proposition, entirely independent of those already cited, is closely connected with a scheme supported by an "International Association for Voluntary Disarmament", which took its rise in Germany. It is that the League of Nations should take control of the gradual transference of the fighting forces from military to civilian service in such a way that the relative military strength obtaining in each country should not be disturbed. Such a partial and proportional disarmament, analogous to what has already been attained for the naval forces of the world by the Washington Agreement, would probably be better achieved if combined with the positive task of setting up an international service for mutual aid. It should however be noted that several nations have not hesitated to introduce Civilian Service without waiting for the adoption of such a measure in

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\* Note also the Russian law which actually authorises the tribunals to liberate conscientious objectors upon certain civil undertakings fixed by the tribunal in each case ; the alternative service which functioned during the war in England and America, and of a similar kind the Labour Service recently created in Bulgaria and Peru. These legislative measures seem sometimes calculated and even intended to stifle the protests of conscientious objectors against preparation for war. They can only be satisfactory when they sincerely allow these men to undertake constructive work for the community and for the cause of peace.



other countries.

These proposals are mentioned here as indicating in different nations and in differing groups a rising current of feeling flowing towards the end we have in view, and also as suggesting perhaps the best methods of founding an international co-operative Civilian Service.

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The International Service we contemplate would be an organisation as far as possible self-governing. It might one day occupy a position similar to the International Labour

Bureau, and work side by side with this valuable auxiliary to the economic life of the peoples, supplementing and complementing its work by direct service for mutual aid.

Having in mind the above considerations we propose the formation of a group for international action for civilian service and mutual aid, with the following aims :

1. To support in every country and in every way the official transfer of conscientious objectors from military service to a civilian service which would loyally employ their labour in constructive and pacific work.
2. To consider the co-ordination of the civilian services in different nations and their participation in co-operative international service.

It will be our endeavour to seek close co-operation with all disinterested goodwill expressed in religious, ethical, political or economic associations ; and, especially, to be associated whole-heartedly with the pacific and constructive efforts of great official institutions, such as the State or the League of Nations, without ignoring either their present imperfections or the need for their transformation.

The group could dissolve if and when other organisations, such as the League of Nations Union or the International Red Cross, inspired by a similar ideal, should incorporate in full in their programme the two aims indicated above.

If need arises, a statement fixing more precisely the constitution and work of the group could be worked out later. At present persons of either sex who become members express in so doing, but without subscribing to any specific undertaking:

1. Approval of the aims and general principles of the group.
2. Desire to be kept informed of its activities.

Members are asked to address to the Secretary all communication - inquiries, information, suggestions and criticisms – which they deem to be directly or indirectly useful to the work of the group. Expenses will be met by voluntary contributions. The work of the group will be carried on chiefly by correspondence. The desirability of calling a meeting of members, or of their delegates, will be discussed later.

#### IMMEDIATE ACTION.

By the mere fact of its existence this group should exercise a helpful influence on the development of Civilian Service and of international organisation for mutual aid. It will show the nations which have introduced Civilian Service that their effort is followed throughout the world with interest and sympathy, and it will convince other nations of the urgent need of associating themselves with this effort by demanding new legislation.

It will draw the attention of the League of Nations, and of private societies working for social progress, to the possibility of enlisting the services of men opposed to war and the preparation of war - men whose goodwill and energy have many a time stood the test - for the all-important work of international co-operation.

It will inform these official and private associations of its constitution and programme by communicating to



them this statement with the list of persons of all nationalities who have declared themselves in sympathy. *To become a member is in itself an important contribution to the work before the Group.* We earnestly appeal to you to join the group by sending your name and address-to the Secretary kindly indicating also your nationality.

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K. SVELMÖE- THOMSEN.	Denmark	(Existing Civilian Service)..
NATANAEL BESKOW	Sweden	"
HALVARD LANGE	Norway	"
NANNIE GRONDHOUT	Holland	"
HUBERT PARRIS	Gt. Britain	(Alternative Service during the war).
OLIVER DRYER		
LILIAN STEVENSON		
HELENE HOLMES	United States	"
YANKO TODOROFF,	Bulgaria	(Labour Service in existence)
MATHILDA WREDE	Finland	(Civilian Service Law in preparation.)
FELIX IVERSEN		
LEONHARD RAGAZ	Switzerland	(Civilian Service under consideration by Authorities)
KARL V. GREYERZ		
PAUL BIRUKOFF	Russia	(Conscientious objectors liberated upon accepting civil work).
HENRI HUCHET	France	(Civilian Service under consideration by private groups).
PAUL PASSY		
PRZEMYSL PITTER	Czecho-Slovakia	
F. SIEGMUND-SCHULTZE	Germany	(Labour Service under consideration by private groups)
KARL KEINATH		
MAX METZGER	Austria	"

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This text comes from a undated leaflet, which was published in French, German and English. It is linked to the political petition to introduce alternative service for conscientious objectors in Switzerland from 1923/1923. Pierre Ceresole represented that petition in French speaking part of Switzerland. It seems, that he followed during this campaign the idea for the establishing an international civilian service ('Service Civil International' in French language). This text contains therefore some basic ideas of what SCI shall be.

*In 1924 he was able to realise a service (workcamp), where mainly pacifists an conscientious objectors took part. (P.Rodriguez)*

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