



In Germany and India for peace

Service Civil International
With the reservists of the 246th Infantry in Stuttgart
My great-nephew with Minister Goering
A workcamp in India

Pierre Ceresole, Service Civil International, La Chaux-de-Fonds (Switzerland) 1934

Service Civil International

Historical Background

Fourteen years ago, a German named Walter Koch made a suggestion which led to the Service Civil International organizing its first workcamp. It took place (after the First World War) in France at Esnes near Verdun, and aimed at helping farmers who wanted to be able to get back to working their fields. In November 1920 a number of farmers had no other shelter than the tunnels under the battlefields that had been left by the soldiers.

The group who - for some reason or other - set to work, for five months or a few hours - was made up of two Dutchmen, two Swiss, two Englishmen, three Germans, two Americans and a Hungarian.

Every year since - except 1922, 1923 and 1925 - SCI has regularly carried out campaigns one after the other; in Switzerland, Lichtenstein, France, and in England. The number of volunteers varied from 60 to 710. Detailed information (including photographs) can be found in the reports we have published (at the Workers' Cooperative Printing Works, Lausanne). The most recent work camps took place in 1932 and 1933, in Switzerland, and England involving all together 2200 volunteers.

Aims

From the very beginning, the aim has been to mobilize material and moral resources for mutual aid

between peoples - voluntary donation, dedication and sacrifice - which have been reserved, up until now, by each nation independently, and indeed more especially for the purposes of war or its preparation.

Properly developed, this kind of service would provide the moral equivalent of military service. By propagating itself in the world, creating a new spirit, a new ideal, it would found - in practice and not just in theory - the living community of all humankind, and would thus establish the security of nations on a more solid basis than military preparation could ever do.

The League of Nations and the International Relief Union

The idea of a constructive international service is closely associated with that of a true League of Nations. As a private group the Service Civil International has not, so far, been able to make any requests or propositions to the Geneva body whose rules will not allow it to receive any initiatives other than those coming from member governments.

In principle there is a clear connection between the Service Civil International, as defined above, and the International Relief Union, created by convention of the League of Nations on the 17th July 1927, and which came into effect in December 1932.

In fact, so far, the two organizations have no links whatsoever. The existence of the one is above all practical; its administrative structure hardly exists at all. The other has barely got beyond the stage of creating this framework. It would be most desirable

for them to collaborate closely with one another – or even completely merge. Presently this proposition could come naturally from a state which already has an alternative service for those men who refuse to prepare for war, or a country like Germany which has organized a similar work service since 1932/33.

Voluntary work service in Germany

The work camps carried out by the Service Civil International since 1920 have had a striking material resemblance with the work services set up during the same period in certain countries, such as Bulgaria and Peru; and more recently in 1933 on a larger scale, by the government of the Third Reich in Germany. The German Work Service aims, above all, to rescue young people from the disastrous material and moral consequences of unemployment. It constitutes palliative action to the current intense economic crisis. It has been exclusively organized on a national basis. Consequently Germany's opponents have often accused it - in a more or less camouflaged way - of preparing for the re-establishment of military service.

Collaboration among the different work services

In founding the International Relief Union, the League of Nations no doubt intended to promote understanding between peoples through mutual aid, but it doesn't seem to have considered developing this Union into a veritable army for peace where young people of various countries would get to know one another ; and would become acquainted with the population amongst whom, and for whom they work whilst at the same time acquiring similar habits of discipline, order and dedication which a military institution could impart to them. Neither does it seem to have thought of offering service and adventure for a constructive peace as a moral equivalent of military service, any more than of its political equivalent. It has not proposed replacing national armaments by developing a service which would dry up the very source of mistrust and hate, thereby securing for all nations more profound peace and security; of an entirely different nature to that currently afforded by military preparations.

Work Services like the one in Germany have been fully recognized and used as a substitute for the army in educating young citizens, but on an international level they have not been considered for development, thus not affording our civilization a more efficient and dignified substitute for national military defence. On the contrary, as we have indicated, in general those who advocate this type of service, take care to point out that they only want to adopt it for their « national

territory ».

Up until now, neither the League of Nations nor national work services, have been able to, or even wanted to, consider constructing an international service as one of the surest means (even though it is slow and gradual, it is nevertheless thorough) of moving towards disarmament.

Everyone will agree that, even to defend the most essential of rights and the most sacred of causes, it is criminal to cold-bloodedly prepare for putting a man to death, if one hasn't already exhausted all other alternatives. Violating this most obvious rule reveals the most grave transgression against morality, and the most disastrous of armament policies commonly used by all nations.

Our hope is that the International Relief Union, the states which organize national work services, and the states which have already created an alternative service for conscientious objectors, will eventually agree on gradually creating - as indicated above – a peace army. A peace army that would wholly achieve all the qualities which, little by little, will afford the replacement of the educational and political functions of present-day armies.

Even if states maintain their military units, they should at least admit that under certain conditions, they could fully incorporate into this international peace army, those who want to defend their own nation - and all nations – in this new way.

Many men still admit the necessity, and the possibility of having to do military service themselves. Nevertheless, they support the work of the Service Civil International with all their might. It's logical.

The gentleman who prepares a weapon, whilst sincerely regretting having to do it, will show his sincerity by doing everything possible to avoid ever having to use it. So, the honest soldier will support - with all his might - whatsoever can reduce misunderstanding, mistrust, and hatred between men. Thus the Swiss Military Department has regularly given its fullest and most intelligent support to the campaigns of the Service Civil International.

Today many men feel morally obliged to go further: they can no longer – without treason or cowardice – accept the military preparation that the State still requires of them. But they are fully aware of all the risks and all the objections.

My trip to Germany

Our responsibilities

In Switzerland as elsewhere, Adolf Hitler and Japan are reproached for their unwillingness to cooperate

with the League of Nations.

1. It is easily forgotten that in 1920, first and foremost, Switzerland refused to give its outright support to the new principle. It declared « We are neutral, we maintain our army to defend ourselves, but in no way will we use it to defend others ». It created the first breach.
2. Writing in the 'Gazette de Lausanne' of 16th February 1932, a Swiss colonel drafted out the stance that Switzerland should adopt at the disarmament conference, in the following terms : « Unable to run as fast as the others, we should, with all our might, support any measure which might slow them down without in any way reducing our own pace. In other words, we should try and check the development in other armies of everything we lack in ours ». If everyone thought in a like manner, the disarmament conference would be nothing but a very costly comedy.
3. In February 1932, the head of the Swiss delegation to the disarmament conference, himself a member of the Swiss government, declared at the opening ceremony: « A fundamental point has been established. The moratorium on armaments which was voted in last year is henceforth definitive. At the end of this conference, chemical and germ warfare will be definitively forbidden. » (Journal de Genève, 17th February 1932). Four months later, without any new development having taken place, whilst the conference was in full session, the Swiss Federal Council put forward a motion, which was then passed by the Federal Chambers for 1, 350,000 francs to be spent on gas masks – solemnly forbidden under the terms of the conference.

If we reflect upon these examples – which it would be easy to multiply – and if we don't refuse straight away to be objective, like one of our ministers, we will see that we are already fraternally associated with the Japanese, the government of the Third Reich, and apparently with all the other governments in the world, by our real, and insurmountable distrust, in relation to the League of Nations and to the new ideal it represents.

It is said that the worst thing that could happen to Switzerland if it neglected its armaments would be to be conquered and annexed by Hitler's government, like the Vaud Savoyard was conquered and annexed by the Bernois in the 16th century. Such an event would not make anyone happy; but it wouldn't be the worst outcome. The worst thing that could happen to us would be to continue living the profound lie and the most perfect hypocrisy – perfect because unconscious – in which our national prejudices keep us today.

At a push, we could imagine, that we want to defend our country by every possible means;

a Switzerland which would distinguish itself by its faith, its generous goodwill, its heroism –

accepting the necessary risks of the new order. But even that is contradictory. By the political and military measures it envisages for defending itself, Switzerland will, in reality, be committing suicide. If it abandons its ideal, it will no longer exist.

Setting off

Your cannons and machine guns do not defend me. They bother me. They suffocate me. Take them away, let me go and see the Germans. I am perfectly sure that over there I will find men, who are decent people, rather similar to us – when we and they are not beset by militaristic ravings.

I carried out this project on the 16th November 1933, four days after the landslide victory that legitimated the government of the Third Reich. I did not choose that date; it was imposed upon me, and my plan had been decided on well before the 12th November, but I was happy to cross over into Germany just when the régime – that many consider particularly fearsome – was so triumphant. During a similar visit on the 4 August 1918, I was only able to get into Imperial Germany as the decline was just beginning.

As in 1918, I wanted to avoid having to give explanations to customs officers, gendarmes and other officials. Passing through fields and woodlands, meeting only a blackbird and a magpie, I crossed over the border directly from the main road that goes from Schaffhausen to Schleithem-Beggingen, at the German village of Grimmelshofen.

Quite by chance, on the edge of the wood, I came across the stone border marker No.488.

A nice little ivy creeper was, slowly but surely, spiralling up around it ; its stem changing nationality twice every circuit it made!!

Near the border, in Baden Land, there was a wayside cross in the fields and, as I went by I couldn't help thinking: »Oh! Christ! Whatever they say about Germany going back to Thor and Wotan, your sacrifice hasn't been in vain. If I am simply polite and, if possible, brotherly, I will no doubt meet people here who are just as much Christians as people back at home. Maybe I'm expecting too much, but that should suffice for nothing untoward to happen to me. »

From Grimmelshofen, passing under the viaduct, where I had been arrested by a border guard in 1918, I came to the school in Fuetzen. That's where, fifteen years ago, I spent two nights with the soldiers in the guardroom, before being evacuated to Constance.

Again, there was also a cross, high up on the partition wall and, set tidily in a rack at its feet, were the station's forty rifles: Christ – Wotan, half and half – here as elsewhere.

I remember now, in the twilight, a young soldier was telling his older comrades about the destruction he had seen wreaked on a Indian cavalry charge on the British front at the beginning of the war. On the 16th November 1933, no one arrested me or even stared at me for that matter. Wanting to see the Christ with rifles again, I visited Herr Hild the schoolmaster. I explained what I wanted, but he did not understand my request very much, and his wife even less so. On the square, a nazi in uniform was drilling the primary school children. A fearsome symptom – perhaps but not much more than our Lausanne Cadet Corps exercises on Wednesday afternoons. We all had repeating rifles. For the time being, at least, these children did not have any weapons, and their instructor only wore a sort of sword or dagger at his side, which, seen close up, - seemed for the time being, to be no more than a paperknife.

On barn doors, farm walls and in the waiting room at the station in Fuetzen, - the posters left over from the election of the 12th November were still to be seen everywhere. On each of them was the word 'Peace'; 'Peace' glaringly repeated over and over again, alternating with the pictures of Adolf Hitler and Hindenburg.

« Camouflage » you say? Perhaps. But it is interesting to observe that in order to lead voters up the garden path one had to camouflage everything as peaceful, rather than saying « Vote for us, for revenge and the rebirth of the glorious German army ».

Arriving in Stuttgart on the morning of the 17th, I went directly to the National Socialist Party headquarters – 'the Parteihaus' - in Goethestrasse, but I was not received until three days later in fact. The people of Stuttgart - at least all those I came across – good and kind, have all been won-over to the régime. I expected as much, and at first I was convinced that the idea and the profound hope which united them was to see the renaissance of Germany's military might and the possibility of gaining revenge. Now I can see that I was mistaken. There is something else, more complex: the profound satisfaction imparted by order which by and large corresponds to the natural instinct of this people. Like a piece of paper which has been rolled up for a long time appears tortured when unrolled. Let it go and it swiftly springs back to its former shape: nicely rolled up again.

Once again the joy of feeling commanded, supervised, « in order »!

That doesn't explain everything but at any rate, it is

sufficient to understand the pleasure that the public gets out of these grand processions, marching in uniform, without carrying weapons – a subject of surprise and anxiety when seen from abroad. Indeed we could easily graft on to this, with the greatest of ease, the most perfect militarism. Whether the graft takes or not will largely depend on foreign powers and the climate it will itself create.

Certain tiny impressions are not at all the least significant. A peasant woman and her two children are sitting in the waiting room at Fuetzen. They look tired. Their clothes are clean, but the mud on the soles of their shoes shows that they have come quite some distance across fields. Nowhere on earth would one find more honest and sympathetic faces; no look more serious and more endearing than that which the little boy lavishes on his mother. Decisions of life or death should be taken in the direct light of such a look, and not on the directions of orders from chancelleries.

I chatted for half an hour with the leaders present in the Parteihaus. The manager himself, after having me informed four times that he was going to receive me, left

« for several days ». I was neither hanged, arrested, or even blamed for having crossed the border without formalities like a bird flitting through the woods.

At five o'clock I found the manager of the Work Service for the region of Stuttgart in his office. As he still had some urgent work to finish, he invited me to come around to his place for a cup of tea that very evening. He is a committed national socialist, and clearly for the most honourable of motives. Nevertheless there are still things that even the most respectable national socialist can not explain to you. It is impossible to list here all these memories. I will simply reproduce here the summary of the reasons for my trip to Germany, that was the list I handed in, in German, at the Parteihaus as the explanation for my visit:

Why I am in Germany.

- 1 To find out at first hand whether the Germans really want peace, or if as sometimes claimed abroad, they want war at all costs, even if they could 'conquer the world' by other means and to everyone's satisfaction.
- 2 Because, from what is said in the papers, a book called 'Gewalt und Gewaltlosigkeit'* ('Violence and Non-Violence') - which contains an article of mine about the Service Civil International – has been solemnly burned in Germany.¹

¹ I took a copy of this book with me to Germany, and

I wanted to introduce myself personally, to give and obtain all the relevant information on this affair, and to bear all the consequences that could come about.

- 3 Because I have been, on the one hand, 'burnt' in the aforementioned article and, on the other, we have received requests on four occasions by the German National Library in Leipzig to send copies of our reports on the Service Civil International work camps from 1920 to 1933. I would like to forward these reports directly myself from inside German territory.
- 4 Because I consider the Work Service in Germany to be an admirable institution having great possibilities, capable of going as far as Germany truly can in conquering the world, for the benefit of all peoples and, with all the advantages that are expected both generally and exclusively from military training. If possible I would like to discuss this matter with the head of government himself.

With the reservists of the 246th Infantry Reserve Regiment

Here I deal with the most striking incident of the whole of my short stay in Germany, and reproduce the account I made of it in a letter I wrote the day after this strange encounter.

Extract from circular letter N°5

Sunday 19th November 1933, 17h.30
Gasthaus z .Falken.

Dear friends,

Yesterday evening on sending you my letter (N°4), I was preoccupied as to whether I would succeed in making contact with the 246th Infantry Reserve Regiment party or not.

That morning, Saturday, coming out of the hotel on my way to the Parteihaus, I had noticed that they were carrying bundles of flags in the corridors and stairways of the hotel, and, above the entrance they were putting up a garlanded sign, which read:

'R .I. R. 246
IHR KAMERADEN
WILLKOMMEN'²

On enquiry, it turned out that it was the first private reunion of the principal organizers of the gathering, the official part of which was to take place the next day Sunday at the 'Garnisonskirche' (= the Garrison

presented it to the gentlemen at the Parteihaus.

2 The men of the 246th Infantry Reserve Regiment welcome their comrades

church) and at the big Brasserie 'Wulle' ... No less than the cream of the 246th R.I.R. were meeting in my hotel ! Though I hadn't gone looking for it, there it was putting up in my very place of lodging .Thus it appeared that I was confronted with a prime opportunity of having the very close direct contact I had set out to establish in the first place. Only, how should I go about it?

On the Saturday evening, as I was going downstairs to the Dining Room on the ground floor for supper as usual, I noticed that the Reception room on the first floor was already occupied by twenty or so Nazis and in brown uniforms. One of them was coming down behind me. He looked a good – natured, easy-going Swabian fellow. « Is the 246th R.I.R reunion taking place on the ground floor or the first floor? » I enquired. He replied cordially (perhaps taking me for one of the 246th) - « It's down on the ground floor. We are just waiting on the first floor .The reunion starts a 8 o'clock » Straight off, without forethought, I went on - « By the way, I come from Switzerland as a friend of peace, I would like to say a few words to your comrades. Do you think it would be possible? » With the same wholeheartedness he enjoined: » Why not? Ask the Master of Ceremonies who's just over there ».

The 'M.C' was in civvies, no more than about thirty-five, rather thin and pale faced, with finer features than his comrades, with a kinder, more intelligent look about him than the others...Not the slightest arrogance – not an intellectual apparently – nothing at all of a self-sufficient 'Herr Doktor' ! More than likely a skilled manual worker, he reminded me of the senior fitter at Brown – Boveri when I worked there. Very kindly and seriously he listened to my request, and didn't demand any explanations as to what my intentions were, he simply replied « Alright, I'll let you know when the time comes ».

In the meantime the number of 246th veterans was swiftly increasing, and the hall downstairs was packed tight, consequently they flowed out and upstairs to the reception room. Good and decent camaraderie.

There were a few ladies amongst them. People began singing popular songs, with every now and then a soldier's song. Nothing struck me as aggressive, nothing unpleasant. I introduced myself as a Swiss citizen to several people. My presence didn't appear to disturb anyone in the least. There was no sign of nationalistic military fury, as I had more or less expected at a Regimental Party under the Nazi banner. All in all, this assembly had something so utterly human about it, so good natured and comradely, that the very idea of my taking the initiative of interrupting its smooth course with the few remarks that I would make about the atmosphere in general, the situation or my own particular objectives,

seemed to me to be absolutely out of the question. Still, I kept thinking of it nevertheless. Decidedly, in the midst of all the hubbub of this family celebration, the kindly 'M.C.' would forget his promise, or had decided that he just couldn't keep it.

I was just resigning myself, to passing up this strange and unique opportunity, when – at that very instant – like an efficient non-commissioned officer who has waited for that precise moment, he came in and said « If you please. I think you will prefer speaking in the room below ; there are more people down there ».

I very much realized the difficulty and the seriousness of it all, but it appeared he also had his instructions. We went downstairs and, amidst the smoke, crossed the ground-floor reception hall from one end to the other. In front of an audience of between sixty and seventy, just before handing over to me, he added « You know, of course, that you are going to address veteran soldiers «

- « Yes, and I will be as tactful as possible » He rang his bell : « I have the pleasure of introducing a Swiss citizen, who would like to say a few words for peace. I am happy to present Doctor Ceresole, over to you».

Not only did the audience refrain from protesting or sniggering, or showing the slightest sign of being surprised, but they politely applauded!

What I was able to say, and am going to reproduce below, was I believe less interesting than this simple beginning. If, perchance, I had gone there with the idea of making a furious declaration against the 'atrocities' and the régime's contradictions, nothing but this perfect willingness, and good grace to listen to me could have been more keenly disarming. I had the « Hitler and the Army of Peace » poster from the waiting room in Fuetzen, carefully folded and tucked under my arm, and this is more or less what I said :

« Ladies and gentlemen, dear comrades,

I would like to extend my very warmest thanks to your president and to yourselves for allowing myself, as a Swiss citizen and friend of peace, to say a few words to you.

« I know of nothing as cordial and comfortable as the atmosphere here at this reunion, in which I have immediately felt quite at ease, even though on certain points my opinions and my feelings differ from yours.

When travelling through the streets of Stuttgart , and the countryside between the Swiss border and this city, something struck me: the importance that has been given to the call for peace in the recent electoral campaign. I read 'Peace with equal rights' – 'Peace with honour', and everyone must be aware that, in the long run, peace is not possible on any other basis. But, at the risk of maybe spoiling the happy atmosphere of the evening, I have something else to

say. In a reunion of people who have been to war, something must necessarily weigh on your hearts: the memory of horrible events. You have seen horrible things – we Swiss weren't there; we only saw all that from a distance – we did what we could to alleviate the misery. I am convinced that not a single one of you would consent to killing a man, or spill blood, if he caught the slightest glimpse of any means of avoiding doing so.

If by chance anyone of you, on the contrary, felt the urge to 'execute' a formidable internationalist, I would propose that you began with me.

Please excuse the following personal details : I am Swiss – my grandmother was German – I am proud of it ; one of my nephews is called Clive, he is English ; another is called François, he is French ; a third is called Leone, he is Italian – you see ... «

At this moment, one of the bigwigs of the 246th – sensitive to what could have perhaps spoiled the fine military atmosphere – interrupted me, though without any roughness, saying « In order to avoid conflict one only need take seriously our leader Adolf Hitler's goodwill »

This remark gave me the opportunity of unfolding the poster (reproduced hereafter) and continuing with: « And that's precisely the point I wanted to make. Here's a poster I found to be so excellent, that I stole it from the station in Fuetzen! It shows Adolf Hitler, spade in hand, overlooking a Work Service group, with these words: 'The Work and Peace Army say Yes to their leader'.

I would only add one thing: the young people shown in this work group are, for the time being, all German. For peace to come, I would like to see my English nephew, my French nephew and my Italian nephew in that group. Let's banish the word 'international' if you like. A word which irritates you so much because of everything artificial, and of the constructions with no foundations it reminds you of ; let's say simply that young people from all countries should be called upon to work together, for one another, thus constructing peace.



The army of work and peace says « Yes » to their leader !

This is the sort of effort I am committed to making. The idea would be to develop it and, at this point - I must admit that this is rather daring - I would like to be able to talk to your leader himself about the possibilities that present themselves here. As an ordinary citizen, it is difficult for me to approach him. Perhaps I would stand a better chance if I could present Adolf Hitler with a recommendation from the 246th R.I.R!

In short comrades, all I have to say is 'Help us in the

job of constructing peace!' And, once again, thank you for having allowed me to address you this evening «.

The same person who had interrupted me came back curtly with: « Those young people only need to come, they will be very welcome. But, our leader is a man who knows what is what, and what he has to do, and we have nothing to advise him on this subject «.

The Master of Ceremonies thanked me .He briefly summed up all the qualities of the Hitler régime and of the injustice of which Germany has been, and still is, a victim. He closed by saying « Should he so desire, we will give Doctor Ceresole a letter for his fellow citizens, explaining the real intentions of our people which, if understood and even adopted by the other nations would suffice to assure peace in the world « .Without formality I replied « Give me that letter, and the other one too... »

Obviously, the essential thing - for me, first and foremost for my learning, and what I will probably still have to do here - is the mere fact that I had been able to speak in such circumstances without the slightest unpleasant incident. The answers that I was given, and that I have just related here, were not made in an unpleasant tone of voice, but showed real conviction.

Taking the matter further with Berlin

Now I have to complete my mission. The declarations made by the Government of the Third Reich, during the election of 12 th November, concerning its desire for peace, are quite striking. But, the German government cannot be surprised by the fact that foreign powers are not prepared to accept those declarations. There is a clear contradiction between them and certain passages in Adolf Hitler's 'Mein Kampf'. There is the imprisonment of so many people whose only crime was being pacifists, and ardently desiring peace to be organized at an international level. People referred to as 'traitors to their own country'- somewhat like in Switzerland - solely because their wishes are constantly directed towards improving the organization of humanity, which is the only way, after all, of definitively ensuring, happiness for their own people.

There is, more or less, a direct link between the latter and anti-Semitic persecution, the violence of which has disconcerted Germany's best friends abroad. But, we know that, according to the oldest political traditions, governments – even if, at the bottom of it, they have good intentions, they rarely have a clear attitude. If it wants peace, the Government of the Third Reich would find here a marvellous opportunity of proving it brilliantly. It has itself undertaken the setting up of a work service; why then wouldn't it lend itself to extending and developing that service internationally with all the scope we have indicated.

To quote one of our German comrades (a convinced national-socialist)at the recent Service Civil workcamp at Oakengates (Shropshire) in England, "In short, why we can't come to an arrangement with the German Work Service to carry out an international work camp in Germany too?" In fact, in letting me speak at their reunion on the 18th November, the 246th R.I.R has given me a genuine introduction to the Chancellor. I am herewith sending Adolf Hitler an official request for a personal audience, to look into the possibility of developing work services - recently introduced in Germany - on an international basis; which is under consideration in several other countries.

Later on I will have to present a much more precise request.

My great-nephew with Minister Goering.

A coincidence

Getting in touch with the authorities of the Third Reich seemed rather difficult to me. Curiously, an unusual circumstance arose which brushed aside any remaining hesitations.

In front of the assembly of the reservists of the 246th I had mentioned the names of my British nephew Clive, my French nephew François, and my Italian nephew Leone. In this account – written a few hours after the assembly – I have mentioned the immediate reply of someone in the audience: « Those young people only need to come, they will be very welcome ». Neither the person who said this - nor myself for that matter, could foresee that this remark would be confirmed almost immediately.

Leone, my great-nephew is nine years old. His mother is rather shy, and the whole of the Swiss side of the family was stunned to learn that at the beginning of January 1934, a German gentleman - an acquaintance of Leons's parents - had taken him on a trip to Berlin. That's all we knew. Why and wherefore should such a young child, who has never before left his parents, go and visit Berlin. Our amazement was even greater when we learned that the 'National Zeitung of Berlin' of 19th January 1934 had published the following badly reproduced photograph³. It shows

³ The photograph is accompanied by the following text: Camarade Goering receives a young 'ballila'.

Wednesday afternoon, the president of the council of ministers, comrade Goering, received the son of a high-level Italian civil servant, the young ballila Leone Ré. President Goering made him a present of a signed photograph of himself, with the words: 'To

Leone as a young 'ballila'⁴ being kindly received by Minister Goering. It appears that he also made a similar visit to the Chancellor, Adolf Hitler himself. Leone's parents were completely unaware of my visit to Germany. On the face of things, there is no external link whatsoever between these two events, which makes the internal link all the more striking.

How, amidst the soldiers of the 246th R.I.R in Stuttgart, did I come to talk about this particular child? At the same time, how –amongst all the hundreds of thousands of possible ballilas –why was it precisely Leone who was sent to Germany?



Interpretation

Just as I am about to request the German government to agree on collaborating in our international effort for an active and constructive peace, a lot of people won't understand what I am trying to do, and will moreover - for various reasons – disapprove. Some will say « How can you collaborate with Adolf Hitler? - He who has persecuted, exiled and tormented -in so many ways - our best friends,- German pacifists ? » Others will say « you want to work with Adolf Hitler -he who threatens democracy in the world, who obliges countries everywhere to increase their armaments, who obliges our youth to prepare for war in their barracks – You want to work with him ? » My reply is : you can see that my very own family, with whom, - despite certain difference of ideas- I have maintained the most affectionate of relations - has become, in the most innocent and natural manner, drawn into this collaboration.

If, as is claimed, the Hitler movement is such a catastrophe, that to protect ourselves from it, we'll have to shell, machinegun, and poison millions of men – for the most part entirely innocent of any

Italy's youth, with my best wishes'

⁴ = Member of the Italian (Fascist) youth organization

political action – what would one have to do then, to those who support that régime, without being forced to – partly Swiss, British, Dutch, Italian, like Leone's family? They would deserve death ten times over.

Nevertheless, I would not – for an instant - dream of hurting members of my own family; nor even breaking the links of affection and recognition which bind me to them. What is true at a private level should be no less so at a public or international one. Thus it would be impossible for me to make the slightest murderous gesture or give in to feelings of hate or distrust towards the Third Reich, despite the fear it inspires in some people.

For internal peremptory reasons I know that the double publicity – national-socialist and fascist – afforded by this child, is not the crime some people would consider it to be.

All that, all those things that some people find revolting, it is me, myself. 'Tatwamasi' as the Hindus say. Hate and distrust must fall away. I am unable to completely lose my temper with someone if I realize that he or she is no other than my own reflection in a mirror. This child commits us to collaborating.

Leone's introduction to the authorities of the Third Reich will favourably replace mine which I wouldn't have been able to obtain, without difficulties, from certain Swiss diplomatic or political figures.

This child will perhaps allow me to carry out a wholly Swiss task, that of rapprochement and reconciliation between peoples through collaboration and mutual aid.

A work camp in India and in other countries

I would further like to point out the aim of the audience I am requesting from the German authorities:

1. For a long time now our volunteer friends of the Service Civil International, especially the French and the English, would like a work camp to be organized in Germany similar to those we have carried out in Lichtenstein, France and Switzerland in recent years.

We request the German government to consider the

possibility of such a workcamp taking place in Germany, and to support us with its experience, and in actively collaborating with us in work camp projects we might organize elsewhere. Two camps are already planned for this summer: one in England and one in Switzerland.

2. A request has just reached us for a particularly large and difficult project.

It is to participate in repairing and reconstructing in the region of Bihar in India, where an area of 60,000 square kilometres was devastated by an earthquake on 15th January 1934.

For this work, there is complete agreement between the Indian national movement and the British Government. Complementary participation of even a limited number of volunteers from different countries would make this project a general manifestation of peace and goodwill; which is so necessary in the world today.

If Germany could assist us in this project, even if only by giving us moral support (financial matters are secondary; they can be resolved in a number of ways of course), it is obvious that her desire for peace would be more easily, and more wholly recognized than hitherto.

Serving the nation clearly affords us a high ideal, and we must admit that the present heads of the Italian and German governments - whom many consider to be enemies of peace – have proclaimed and defended this ideal with passionate sincerity and remarkable energy. Won't these leaders,- as well as those of other states - allow our ideal of service to be raised even higher, and, in order to serve our country, that we first and foremost serve the great family of mankind ?

Between 1914 and 1918 more than a million men from New Zealand, Australia, China, the United States, India, and Europe were transported across the world for the adventure of war. Would it be so fantastic today to transport a few hundred Europeans to India for the even greater and nobler adventure of peace?