

Document B : 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.

[...]

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 Bureau¹, 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 Nations², 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.

¹ International Labour Organisation (ILO) founded in 1919 with its office in Geneva. Today specialized body of the United Nations.

² League of Nations : Predecessor of the United Nations (UNO) founded in 1919.

[...]

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.

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)
