

International centre

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): **- (1966)**

Heft 1499

PDF erstellt am: **28.04.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-693797>

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INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

At the Assembly of the Swiss Abroad in Lausanne in August 1964, Mr. J. P. Inebnit of Leeds gave an address in connection with the theme of the gathering "Switzerland and the developing countries".

This is a summary of the principal points made by the speaker regarding the creation in Switzerland of an International Centre for the preparation of leaders for voluntary service.

(1) A hundred years ago in Switzerland, the Genevese, Henri Dunant, laid the foundations of that admirable organisation, dedicated to giving impartial aid, the International Red Cross.

(2) Fifty years ago, two Vaudois, Pierre Ceresole and his brother, Colonel Ernest Ceresole, laid the foundation for a civilian international volunteer service — a new conception in those days — which last year, under various labels, was employing more than one and a half million volunteers spread over five continents.

(3) The end of the second world war saw the birth of the United Nations Organisation with its remarkable specialised agencies. These are the sole existing means by which we can attempt to use reason and justice, to prevent or settle the inevitable conflicts between nations and to resolve great world problems, such as that of hunger. U.N.O. will not be able to perform these necessary functions without the support of world public opinion, particularly that of young people.

(4) In August 1961, the Economic and Social Council decided to accept for projects of U.N.O. and the Specialised Agencies (F.A.O., UNESCO, etc.) some qualified volunteers.

(5) As a result, there is an urgent need to develop means of preparing leaders for these volunteer workers in the Service of the United Nations.

(6) A modest beginning is the Centre which has just been established in France, on the initiative of a compatriot. It is capable of taking about twenty men and a dozen women, for selection, orientation, equipment and dispatch to developing countries, particularly those which are French-speaking.

(7) A similar effort is starting in a working-class district of London, to prepare those volunteers whose knowledge of English fits them more for the former British territories.

(8) There is no need to fear unnecessary duplication in this work because the needs are varied and limitless and the capacities and goodwill offered are being wasted for lack of the means to use them. (Last year, the "Service Civil International" had to refuse thousands of offers, for lack of both financial resources and the personnel to prepare and place would-be volunteers in carefully planned projects.)

(9) The day will undoubtedly come when the United Nations themselves will organise this preparation on a world scale comparable to the needs, but institutions always lag behind individual initiatives and, as a result, it is up to those who really believe in the idea, to create the necessary prototypes.

(10) The start of Kennedy's term as President was marked by the creation of the United States' Peace Corps which is now sending hundreds and will soon be sending thousands of young Americans to the countries chosen by their government. Other countries have followed this example and Switzerland has not lagged behind in the area of technical assistance to developing countries and has

just organised and sent to Africa some small experimental teams.

(11) This excellent way of using the services of young people runs the risk, if it takes on a national character, of missing its essential aim of promoting unity among nations. It also runs the risk of being used as an instrument of international politics, thus transferring the "cold war" into the humanitarian sphere. Therefore teams should seek to have an international character, as much in their composition as in their destination. The United Nations Organisation can help this condition to be fulfilled and at the same time benefit by the revitalising transfusion it would receive from the rising generation.

(12) In conclusion, it seems to us that Switzerland could offer an example in this field, since its neutrality gives it a unique and privileged position. In addition, it has in its midst large numbers of foreigners, students and others, who could gain a new appreciation of the value of manual labour from serving in teams with our fellow-countrymen who in general have no prejudice against work of this kind. The presence of representatives of developing countries in such teams would help to avoid the danger of a completely one-way contribution.

The following resolution was then adopted *nem con* in plenary session.

"We, the Swiss abroad, meeting together at Lausanne, being aware of the great privileges of our neutrality and of the many material advantages which result from it;

"Being also aware of the urgent need to channel the potential goodwill and energies of young people, regardless of nationality, race, political, religious or other beliefs;

"Request our authorities to examine the means by which the recruitment, selection, preparation and equipment of trained volunteers could be made on an international basis, particularly with a view to increasing aid to developing countries and suggest that the creation of an international centre in Switzerland for the purpose, is the first step that should be taken."

The resolution was confirmed at the Assembly in Solothurn the following year. It was also unanimously adopted in Zurich on 31st October, 1964 by the Annual General Meeting of the Swiss United Nations Association.



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