

## Peace...in progress

When a humble story crosses the Big History

The first international camp of voluntary work and international solidarity 1920 - 1921



Visual book conceived by Paolo Maddonni - SCI Italy - 2009

### Peace...on progress When a humble story crosses the Big History

The Big History is that one of the World War First (1914-1918), a real human huge disaster. Today this piece of history is almost forgotten. Nevertheless, this war touched so strongly people's minds that a peace movement started slowly to grow in Europe and in the world.

The humble story is that one of a small group of volunteers who experimented the first residential voluntary action for solidarity and reconstruction: a concrete answer to the regular questions of wars and weapons for solving conflicts. The idea was simple and extraordinary: people coming from countries which were enemies till yesterday, now working side by side for rebuilding material damages and deep prejudices. It was not easy to identify, in 1920, a community wishing to host this revolutionary experience.

## Peace...on progress When a humble story crosses the Big History

Once in Esnes, a village in the area of Verdun – France - coordinators and volunteers start their recovery activities. They face several difficulties but their motivation is very strong. People in Esnes are sometimes friendly, sometimes not: the effects and injuries of the war are still too vivid in people's minds and in the village.

We are going to relive the months of that winter, 1920-21, through the words and the pictures of those who gave life to that extraordinary experience, the first international solidarity work camp.

This experience lead to the creation of several organizations and movements which still today are using the international camps as their main tool for peace. Pierre Cérésole, the main promoter of the first camp, founded the Service Civil International – S.C.I..

### Peace...on progress When a humble story crosses the Big History

Although the texts have been adapted (<u>occasionally with some liberty</u>) by myself, they come from original documents and reports that are part of the International Archives of SCI in Switzerland. Also other publications have been consulted.

Many thanks to Philipp Rodriguez, who allowed me to find and use those documents (<u>archives@service-civil-international.org</u>).

When not mentioned, images are intended not original of SCI archives and produced just for suggesting emotions to the audience. Opinions and texts are only to be considered my personal contributions to the peace ideal, and are not the official statement of any organization.

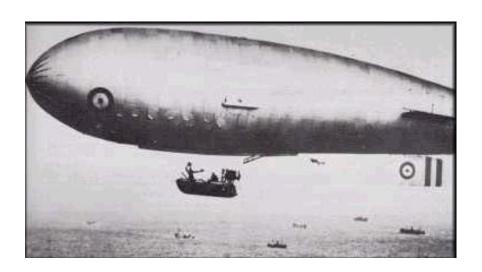
Paolo Maddonni

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"the Big War"

1914 - 1918







Turkey **Albania United Kingdom** The Netherlands **United States of America** Bulgaria Italy **Australia** Belgium Russia

**Portugal** Serbia **France Switzerland** Montenegro Romania **Austria - Hungary** Japan Germany **Spain** 

Who was against who? Which were the neutral countries?

### One side: central empires and allied countries Austria – Hungary, Turkey, Bulgaria, Germany

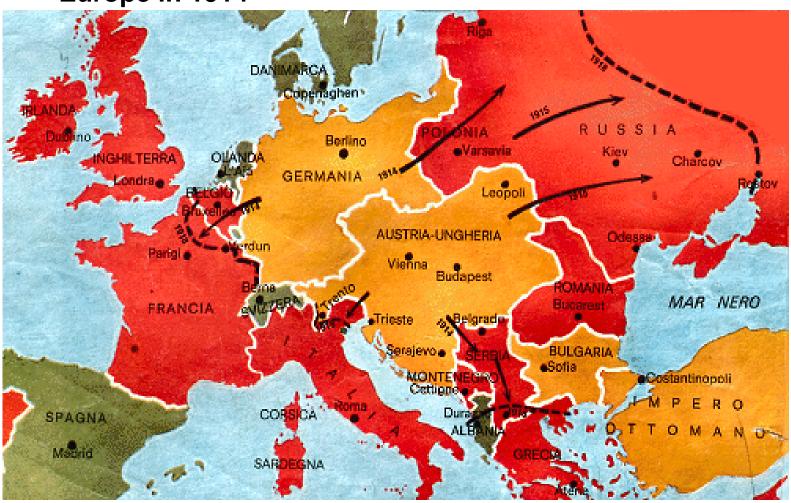
### The other side: Entente and allied countries

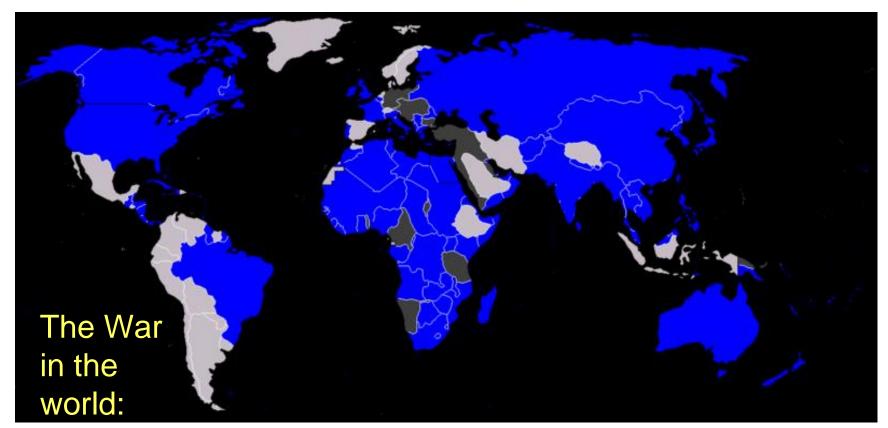
Belgium, Portugal, Serbia, Italia (from '15), France, Australia, United Kingdom, Montenegro, Japan, United States of America (from '17) Romania, Russia (till '17) (then also Costarica, Nicaragua, Liberia, Greece, Brazil, Guatemala, Cuba, Siam)

### Some neutral countries:

The Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, Albania, Scandinavian countries...

**Europe in 1914** 





in blue the countries officially involved

### How it started

1914 – Sarajevo: the archduke Ferdinand and his wife Sofia are killed by Gavrilo Princip, young member of the group for an independent Slav country. Austro-Hungarian Empire declared war

to Serbia.



Opal sessors incl. 5

and defermed \$1.70; made provided \$1.50

La consegna del passaporto all'Ambasciatore di Francesco e il richiamo del nostro Ambasciatore a Vienna

La circolare di Sonnino ai nostri rappresentanti all'Estero - L'ultima Nota di Burian - La guerra per la difesa del buon diritto d'Italia incomincia oggi.

(PER TELEFORO ALLA "STAMPA.)

BOMA, 28

Il Ministre (ngli Affart Reteri la diretta eggi un telegromma structure at reportenement idelinal all'entere (real) più securit Darte per la guerra se mest pressent à sonne suc abe Striese real :

" Il Regio Governo, tenuto conto di quanto è sopra esposto, confor-les set luy beno, que o bene de presentati di Station tato dai voti del Parlamento e dalle roperti ille alteria del properti del esperie del esp solenni manifestazioni del Paese, appropriate del paese ha deliberato di rompere gli indugira mon

generale Caderna

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Italy against Austria

The polite war: at that time the use was to send official messages to the ambassadors of the enemy country, to the ambian the war open is provided and the control of the cont



### Soldiers







### Public opinion and war



Protests, demonstrations, strikes, departures

## How many victims among soldiers and civilians during the whole conflicts?

- A 9 millions deaths, 20 millions injured
- B 4 millions deaths, 6 millions injured
- C 15 millions deaths, 12 millions injured
- D 2 millions deaths, 3 millions injured

Finally, the war produced more than 9 millions of deaths and over 20 millions of injured people.

Right after the war, the epidemic of "Spanish" fever provokes in whole Europe more than 1,700.000 victims, 600.00 only in Italy.

Reminder - The Second World War:

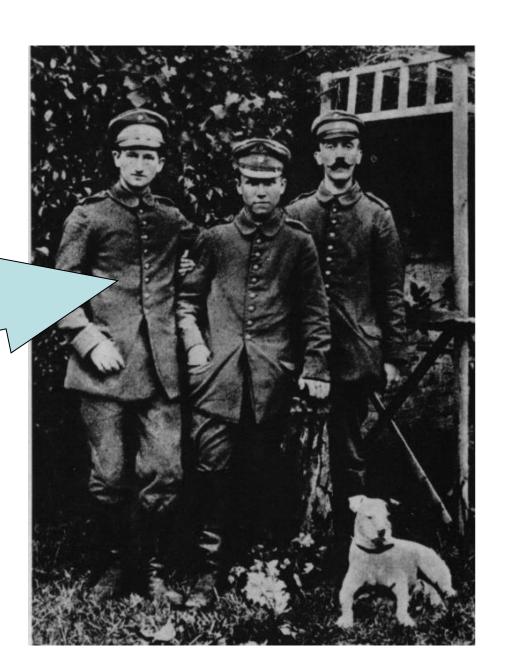
60 millions deaths, including 25 millions soldiers and 35 millions civilians

### **Europe in 1923, new countries, new frontiers**

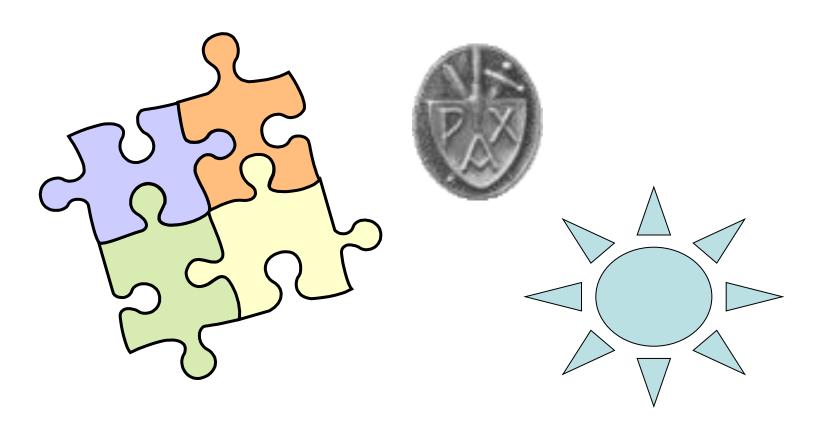
#### 50. L'Europa nel 1923, all'indomani della Grande Guerra



Who is this young Austrian soldier of WW1?



### After the war destruction ...



... re-building peace

No more war: the beginning of an international peace movement



Three international peace groups were founded in Bilthoven, the Netherlands, in the aftermath of World War I: the International Fellowship of Reconciliation in 1919, Service Civil International in 1920, and War Resisters' International in 1921. The founding meetings of all three groups took place at the home of the pacifists and educators Kees and Betty Boeke

#### Pierre Ceresole - The Founder of Service Civil International



Pierre Ceresole was born in 1879 in Lausanne. His family was wealthy and his father was for some time the president of the Swiss Federal Council. Pierre was gifted and was given a good education. He studied mathematics with a plan of becoming an engineer and was expected to make a brilliant career. However, he was neither attracted by money nor position. He gave the money he inherited from his father to the State, because he did not think he deserved it

Pierre's interests in people took him out on a long journey in 1910. He went to the USA, where after some time he got the idea of continuing around the world. But first he had to earn some more money. He tried many different jobs. Amongst other things he worked as a gravedigger, using a pick and



shovel for the first time. These tools were to become very important in his life.

Pierre CERESOLE attended the meeting in Bilthoven in 1919. He became the secretary of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation and proposed to identify a village on the French-German border in order to start a peace action. Later he founded Service Civil International.

### A German delegate to Bilthoven – 1919

"We have been talking for two days: is there no practical work we can do to give expression to what we have been saying?

My brother was a soldier in Northern France: he killed, and he was killed in Verdun.

We need to help rebuild these ruins."

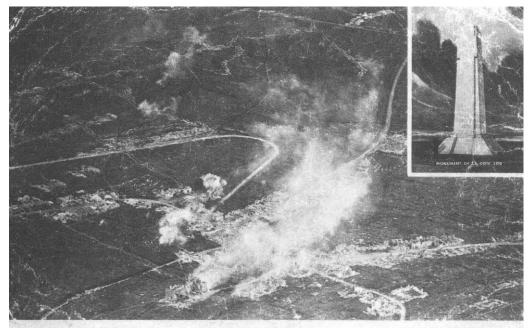


Pierre Cérésole and his colleague Hubert Parris visited several villages: local authorities were happy to host volunteers, but then refused to have German people among the volunteers.





Only at Esnes, village close to Verdun, totally destroyed by the war, the Major accepted the peace volunteers' conditions.



ESNES ET LES PENTES SUD-OUEST DE 304 SOUS LE BOMBARDEMENT EN 1916





#### REPORT no. 1

Pierre Cérésole and I left Frankfurt on the evening of 16th November, and we arrived in Clermont the next day at noon. We collected materials, furniture and tools generously provided by the local group of the Movement for Reconciliation. Two hours before our departure from Clermont, on Thursday 18th November 1920, we rejoiced for the arrival of our Dutch friend Chris Rison, who was able to join us during the first difficult days in Esnes. There, we settled in a ruined shack without floor or windows. Nevertheless, we put down our camp beds and we even slept well, regardless of the 15 degrees below zero! The next day we fixed up our base and on Saturday we placed the first stone of the first portable house we would build for the homeless people in Esnes.

We are full of enthusiasm and people thank us all the time, but we are still waiting for our German friends, who will hopefully join us soon.

On behalf of the Service Civil International group **Hubert Parris**Esnes, 21st November 1920







### Report no. 2

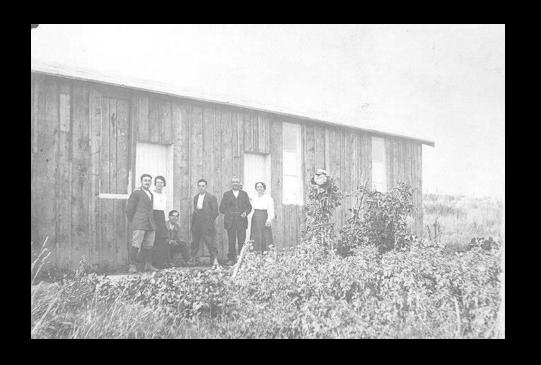
Right on Christmas day, our first friend-former enemy finally joined us: it's a good omen for the work we started here to rebuild "peace on earth for the men of goodwill". He is **Adalbert Szilard**, a musician and student of architecture in Budapest. Today it's in Hungary, but one year ago Budapest was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Since our last report, we have achieved the construction of two temporary houses for homeless people, one of which is now our base. A third one will be ready soon. At the end of November, a Dutch teacher, **Maria Van der Linden**, joined our group and her presence has been essential for a best management of the house and the meals. Unfortunately, a week later, Chris, the other Dutch volunteer, had to quit the camp for family reasons. The delay in the arrival of the German volunteers should be due to visa problems, but local authorities have told us that everything is ready now. We look forward to welcoming them, as we need them so much for speeding up the construction.

As suggested by Madame Biéler, head of the Relief Committee, Hubert Parris has started to give English lessons to about 15 boys and girls of Esnes.

On behalf of the Service Civil International group

Pierre Cérésole Esnes, 26th December 1920





#### REPORT no. 3

At the turn of the new year, our international group is now finally completed. Three German volunteers have arrived, and we welcome them warmly:

Valentin Hopper, artisan, soldier in France

Karl Keinath, also an artisan, soldier in Belgium and Russia

Helmut Starke, shop tenant, soldier in Russia

They look shy and don't speak French, so they communicate in German with some of us, but they are very motivated and ready to work. Perhaps other German friends will join the camp, and in the meanwhile Pierre's brother, **Ernest Cérésole**, has also arrived in Esnes. He has been a lieutenant in the Swiss army, so he is a bit strong in discipline, but he likes a laugh too. Our fourth house is almost completed, with a delay caused by the lack of some iron joints that never arrived. In the end we decided to make our own. Karl has been extremely useful in this task, as he worked as a smith in Cologne before the war. He has even been able to restore a rusty military forge which villagers are now using to repair farming tools.

There are also bad news, and we are worrying for the future of our project: it seems that the French government intends to reduce the support to these areas, so that they will probably not send us more portables to build. Nevertheless there are so many urgent jobs to do, we just need to find the financial resources.

Thanks to you all for the support you provide us all the time.

On behalf of the Service Civil International group

**Hubert Parris** Esnes, 28 gennaio 1921



### **VALENTIN**, letter – 15th February 1921

Dear Mummy,

I've been here in Esnes for one month now, and everything is all right. Don't be scared for me, the war is over. It has been really important to me to return to France after the two years I spent



fighting in a trench at the front, where I saw and did horrible things. I would not have been able to live a normal life, if I hadn't got the chance to "see" the consequences of the evil of a war. They sent us singing to the war, but our eyes were shut. Now I'm silent, but the peace is opening my eyes.

I can only communicate with these people by gestures, but I can see the sorrow of a broken life.

Yesterday I was helping an old peasant to remove stones and rubble from his fruit garden. When he realized that we were alone, he came very close to me and spoke in a comprehensible German. He told me in a whisper that his grandmother was from Berlin. Then he started crying, and he said: "The war will start again. It will end only when either Germany or France will disappear. We hate each other too much...".

Mum, I'm 22 years old. I don't want to think that after this horrible war another one will come. These extraordinary people working with me let me hope that everybody, on their humble side, can do a lot. I'm using my brain now, and for the first time in my life, I feel I am important to somebody.

A big hug,

your Valentin





#### Report no. 4

Dear friends,

If I had sent this report to you only one week ago, you would have read of enthusiastic perspectives for our service in at least 3 other villages close to Esnes. There we could have worked to help the farmers to clear their fields from mines and ruins, as well as to reconstruct houses and roads. Thanks to the donation of 100 pounds from the British committee of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the loan of a vehicle from the French committee we were on the point of planning the recruitment of other groups of volunteers from England, Switzerland, Germany and the United States.

But two days ago, right the day before three of us were supposed to move to a close village to start the activities, we received the peremptory order by the Prefecture – on behalf of the Municipality of Esnes – to stop any work we were doing. The order also stated that no local authority in the future can appoint us any kind of work, paid or voluntary. No explanations justified this order.

As a matter of fact, during the last couple of weeks we have only been working with individuals and families, helping to clean their fields or repair their house, in exchange of some food or simple vegetables. This was because we had finished building the portable and were waiting for new tasks from the municipality.

We know the reason behind this behaviour: this order tries to satisfy those few people here in Esnes that are hostile to our service: Madame Biéler, in particular, and her Relief Committee. They are right: we are attempting to destroy the hatred towards Germany by the French, and we are trying to fight the fanatic patriotism, which is now the dominant religion in the country. But we don't intend to give up: with your usual and really appreciated support, we can continue.

On behalf of the Service Civil International group

#### **Hubert Parris**

Esnes, 9th March 1921

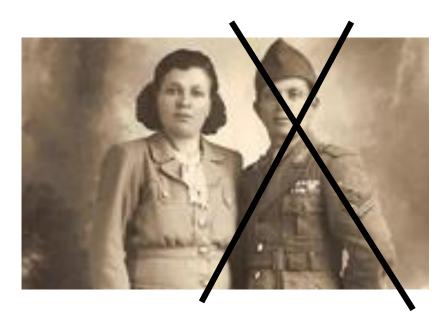


Finally, Pierre is called for a meeting with the authorities of Esnes.



### **Madame Biéler**

"Mister Cérésole, we don't want to undervalue the very useful work done by the international volunteers. Their arrival last November gave us vitality and hope to overcome the disaster of the war. Furthermore, our Committee got new impulse and our people rediscovered the spirit of solidarity. We sincerely thank you very much."



"But we cannot accept the presence of these ENEMIES of our homeland, of these butchers of our people, this is a violence that cannot be imposed upon us! Our widows and orphans have to be protected from this new outrage.

A long time will be needed for our injuries to be cured and healed, if this will ever happen. Rebuilding cannot mean to forget to mourn our dead and our ruins."

### Monsieur LeGay, Major of Esnes

Listen to me, dear Pierre, the people of Esnes are really happy to host your volunteers. Of course there are always rude people: but how to forget that one year ago we were still under the cannons' fire?



You know very well that I don't think anything bad against these Germans and Austrian you took here. But some – like Madame Biéler – still look at them as if they have their helmets on their heads. Besides, they don't speak one word of French, we cannot make friends with them and somebody is even whispering that they are spies preparing a new attack from Germany. I tell them that these ideas are just absurdities, but it's impossible to argue with these obstinate farmers and widows! Your help is precious to us, Pierre.

Listen to me: send home those Kraut... sorry, I mean those German volunteers, and you'll see that in Esnes everybody likes you again.

# Pierre calls the group of volunteers for a meeting and report what Monsieur LeGay and Madame Bièler have told him.

"The major and the Relief committee thank us a lot for our support and intend to continue with our camp and they. But at the condition that our German friends quitted the camp. I don't want to take decision alone, as we are a group. What do you think we should do?"



All the volunteers express their opinion.



### **Helmut (translated by ADALBERT)**

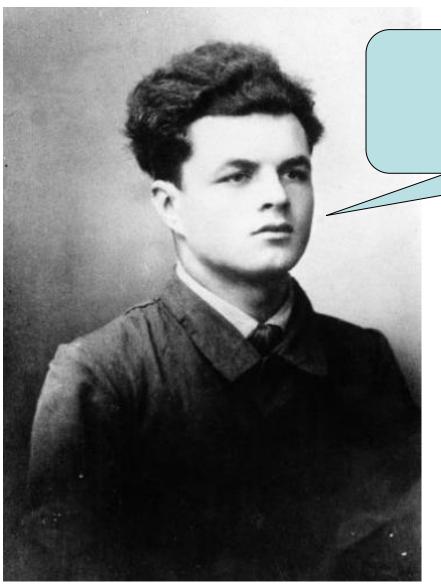




I think, and I'm sure my German comrades agree, that we don't want to create troubles to the project. The idea of an international work camp is just wonderful, we feel so happy to share this experience with you. It's true, we don't speak French, but somehow we can communicate with the people in the village. But the war is still too close to them. It's too early to speak about peace, even though we don't speak but we work for peace.

We'll leave tomorrow, your work here is too important to be endangered.

# **Helmut (to show his effort to learn French)**



ehm... ehm... MERZI!

# **Ernest Cérésole**



We are, all together, a group. A close-knit group. We are here for a very important reason and purpose, which is not clearing a field or building wooden houses.

We are building the future.
In time of war as in time of peace we have to achieve our objectives
ALL TOGETHER,

OR ALL TOGETHER WE WILL DIE!!!!

... well... I mean... we will go away all together.

### **MARIA**

Maybe we could try to find a compromise. We can ask the local French ladies of the Relief Committee to teach French to our German friends, so they will be able to understand and speak to everybody.

Or we can send them back home for 2 or 3 weeks, so the local authorities will give us some more work to do. Then our German volunteers can study some French at home and finally they can come back here.





# KARL (very angry!)

SPEAK FRENZ KAPUTT HART! DAMN! DEPARTURE, DON'T LIKE MYSELF. WE WORKEN WELL UND CONTENT. YOU SWITZERISCH UND ENGLISH MEN, YOU LEAVE. WE DEUTSCH, WE STAY HERE. WE WORKEN FUR PEACE. UND IF FRENZ PERZONS NOT LIKE WE DEUTSCH, I TAKE MY GROSSE HAMMER UND... KAPUTT!!!!!!!



# The discussion continued for long time: what do you think they finally decided?

Take one minute for you. If you were one of those volunteers, which solution you would have suggested?

At the end, the group took a decision. The next days, Pierre Cérésole and the volunteers asked to meet the major and the community of Esnes.

<u>Pierre CERESOLE – to an open meeting with the community in Esnes</u>

"Distinguished Major, member of the Relief Committee, people of Esnes,
We are in April now, and for 5 months we – our group of international volunteers - have been living inside your community, which suffered so

much because of the war. We arrived in wintertime, and met ruins and sorrows. We tried to provide help and solidarity. We met hope too: a special hope that is your hope and our hope. Peace must become stronger than war.

We will leave tomorrow, we will ALL go away.

Our solidarity is without borders, we don't accept violence or hate, we don't accept divisions and prejudices. We thank you with all our heart for your hospitality and also for having allowed us to test our motivation. We will continue our experiment elsewhere. We too want to create an army, a peace army of people of goodwill. An army specialised against the poisoned gas of misunderstanding, prejudice, hostility and hatred imposed by political powers. A peaceful army made of men and women who choose to leave their comfortable homes and their safe habits to bring support and solidarity to those who are in need or to share a common ideal. Men and women who fight in order to use all their positive energy to highlight what we have in common rather than arguing on what divides us. Here in Esnes we planted a seed. History will help it to grow. "

# We'll leave tomorrow ...

# ... we will all leave tomorrow

So the group left and the first international camp ended without achieving all its purposes. Nevertheless the seed planted in Esnes gave its fruits, and many organizations and thousands of volunteers will start to move around the world.



1 dans le passé.» ler cela de l'ahumanisme comme il est rafraichisisme» compare à la théoqui s'interdit d'intervenir politique aussi longtemps se contente de faire torer les hommes par milliers en empoisonnant leur âme : désespoir, et qui ne comperfois, qu'au moment ob - l'Eglise - est atteint!

Une partie au moins du travail de la aux plus grands sacrifices d'are-police moderne est approuvée de tous : tous cendraient sans hésiter ses services positifs; mesures sanitaires; voie- pauvreté a ils 40 rie: police de la circulation; information; sinsi. aide au public de toute espèce etc. dont plusieurs n'impliquent contraintelence à l'égard de personne.

Ne pourrions-nous pas entrepl médiatement le développement sys de ce qui, dans le monde inte correspondrait à ces services positi mement précieux rendus des aux par la police ordinaire à l'intéri chaque pays ?

Une bonne partie du Iravail de Nations a été faite dans cett Nous pourrions faire hien plu

#### Une Armée de la paix,

nant l'idée qui a délà surgi de milieux et bien des esprits no s de constituer une nouvelle de 'Armée de la paix qui lutterai ent contre les gaz asphyxiants des dus, de la méliance et de la haine ant des hommes et des femmes me pays - ou mieux encore de férents -- pour secourir ensemble quel groupe d'hommes en détresse raient avoir besoin de leur aide porte quel pays. Cette Armée de eeratt un nouvel enthousiasme, un prit de dévouement et de sacrifice. erverait, en les asublimante dans le formes les valeurs morales imassociées aujourd'hui à l'institu-

up plus important que les résulnels cua-mêmes — et également I pour ceux qui serviraient et qui seraient servis -, l'Esprit ette nouvelle action nous unirait touvelle forme pratique de priere . «Si mous nous aidons fidèle-ns les autres. O Dieu aide nous!» d'engager un débat sur des utables, concentrons toute notre inté, notre énergie, notre enthoule terrain où nous nous accorpérience prouve que ce terrain u fur et à mesure que nous l'ex-Nous nous comprendrons mieux s points et pourrons reprendre des discussions nécessaires pour nouveaux progrès.

s récents événements, après la lunich» d'où s'exhale une odeur générale besucoup plus que de pense pas spécialement au geste rlain mais à tout ce qui y a Europe et ailleurs depuis 20 les promesses de la «Société des la position du pacifiste est in-

ne s'engage pas dans one action intense qui lui suit propre. La multiplication de dictateurs peut bien m'effrayer et me consterner ai je ne fais pas autre chose que de déplorer leur existence. Leur terreur, au contraire, s'évanouit et je puis même envisager, sans en être bouleversé. jusqu'à la conquête et l'invasion de mon

ient of the gifted and rganisant des services pratiques comme expression de leur Bonne Vole studied fonté, ils ont trouvé le moyen supérieur à toute théologie verbale, de manifester coming an et de communiques leur fai. L'esprit de tolérance, la méditation silene a brilliant. cieuse et docile devant une Réalité Spirittracted by

tuelle qui nous depasse tous infiliment nous aidera à nous comprendre et nous rapprocher. En servant de notre micua nous nous

ouvrirons aussi naturellement à la vérité. Piecre Ceresole.

\* Le trait pout-être le plus élevé et le plus important du Quakeriame est qu'il ne prétend à sucun monopole. Il est prêt à admetire que l'es-tentiel de la vie spirituelle se trouve ou se réalise hors de son cerele particulier.

#### Une nouvelle brochure sur le S.C.I.

Ils sont nombreux ceux qui, à l'heure actuelle, en face de la situation tragique du moude, souffuent de leur impuissance, de leur inertie, afors qu'ils vondraient Agis, faire quelque chose pour sortir de marasme dans lequel aous aous dé-

Que ceux ci fisent la brochuse que sirot de faire paraitre la Branche française des «Amis du Service civile. Peut-être y trauverent-ils une issue, ou tout au moien un réconfort, en décourrant qu'il existe une phalange d'hommes de bonne volunté. bien décides à ne pas faisser les choses affer au pire, man au contraire à opposer un berrage à le folie belliqueuse qui semble devoir tout emporter.

Oni, ces hommes out l'auriace de se piesentes en reconstructeurs. Ils ac prétendent à rien moins qu'à construire un ordre nouveau dans le quel - tous arrivisme, tout intérêt personnel exclus -la bonne volunte. l'entraide formezont la base d'un travail commun, utile à sous.

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PIERRE ČERESOLE

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were to become very important in his life.

here he worked as an engineer for two years. At the returned to Switzerland. He was shaken by what he idness of war became more and more clear to him. ing that Christians allowed themselves to be used for ate into an idol. He realised that he must join the

# **Peace** organizations and movements SCI

**CMP-YAP** 

**IBO** 

**ICYE** 

**CCIVS** 

**Alliance** 

and many others

gros, trois phases: et Violence. (Anarchie de la jungle.) : borné mais encore Vinde justice; polices natioationales; le glaive de la

partiale.)

### Brief history of projects in the world





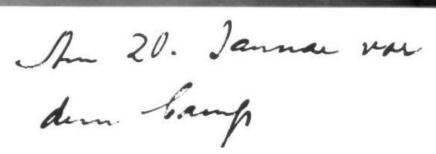
First camp for consciousness objectors Switzerland 1924

# First camp in India

1934













Civil war Spain - 1937



Camp in Israel - 1951



# First camp East-West, Warsaw - Poland - 1955









First camp in Algeria - 1963