



# Pierre Ceresole

A lifetime serving Peace

Bibliothèque de la Ville La Chaux-de-Fonds  
Service Civil International



Bibliothèque  
de la Ville   
La Chaux-de-Fonds

# Pierre Ceresole (1879-1945)

La Chaux-de-Fonds  
Bibliothèque de la ville,  
25.9.2010-15.1.2011

*The La Chaux-de-Fonds Municipal Library has joined forces with Service Civil International to put together an exhibition devoted to Pierre Ceresole, a pacifist personality who is nowadays little-known to the public at large. From the First World War on he worked unstintingly to try to set up a civilian service for conscientious objectors, going as far as to launch a Federal campaign (in Switzerland) in 1922/1923. We have to wait more than seventy years before a public service is set up which replaces military duties for people who officially declare themselves to be conscientious objectors. As a matter of fact, up until 1996 the latter are tried by Military Tribunal and sentenced to prison. We can now appreciate how far we have come since then.*

*As part of SCI's 90th anniversary, in ten display panels, the exhibition takes us through the main phases in the life of the militant pacifist. It also refers to a number of historical landmarks in the development of conscientious objection and non-violence. The personal accounts of volunteers who have taken part in international voluntary work camps highlight Ceresole's heritage.*

*This brochure contains the content of the exhibition with additional information about Service Civil international and the La Chaux-de-Fonds Public Library. It includes as well a short biography of Pierre Ceresole, which shows his evolution to a radical pacifist. An extensive bibliography helps the reader to explore in a broader way his fascinating and complex personality.*

*It is traditional for the La Chaux-de-Fonds Municipal Library to house many collections belonging to associations or people connected with pacifism. For example, the collections belonging to the Esperanto pioneer Edmond Privat, the Centre for Non-Violent Action (CENAC), to that of Max-Henri Béguin and the Service Civil International. So it was quite natural for them to get involved in an exhibition project which is part of this commemoration. The texts have been translated into German and English for display purposes. This exhibition sheds new light on the action of a modern man committed to Peace.*



*Work camp in Lötschental (Switzerland), 1937  
(SCI)*

## Service Civil International

Service Civil International is a non-governmental organization (NGO) which organizes voluntary projects with the objective of promoting peace through concrete actions, essentially through voluntary work camps.

The voluntary projects bring together men and women of all ages irrespective of social and ethnic origins, religions. The aims of SCI fit into a global commitment to promoting peace, solidarity and understanding, between peoples of different cultures. SCI wants to show that non-violent and environmentally friendly alternatives are possible in every field of everyday life. Apart from voluntary work camps, SCI organizes training programmes and awareness-raising activities for international volunteers. Mainly founded by Pierre Ceresole in 1920, SCI is the oldest work camp association. Today there are 43 member branches in 40 countries.

## La Chaux-de-Fonds Public Library

Founded in 1838, a few years after the introduction of printing to La Chaux-de-Fonds, 'La Bibliothèque du Collège' came about thanks to its education authorities. Towards the end of the 19th century, the library underwent a profound metamorphosis. Its promising development stirred a number of worthies to make generous gifts to the library: the Federal Councillor, Numa Droz presented an important documentation about railways, and Célestin Nicolet his complete collection of scientific works.

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## Acknowledgements

### Exhibition design and production

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We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all the people and institutions who have helped in putting together this exhibition, whether by lending documents, translating, proofreading or by taking part in the design of the texts.



*Work camp in Someo (Switzerland), 1924 (SCI)*



# Why have an exhibition about Pierre Ceresole?

*The Municipal Library of La Chaux de Fonds is devoting its main exhibition for 2010 to Pierre Ceresole. It is the first time, in the Canton of Neuchâtel, that an exhibition has been devoted to this important pacifist leader. Ninety years ago, Ceresole founded the Service Civil International (SCI) which today has four thousand volunteers in a thousand work camps around the world.*

*Entitled 'Pierre Ceresole (1879-1945) a lifetime serving peace', the exhibition has been designed and carried out in collaboration with the Service Civil International. The exhibition's texts and illustrations are herein reproduced; they cover the main events in the unique life of the man who created, moulded and carried the SCI. In various ways, the exhibition pays tribute to this emblematic figure, an internationalist, who struggled for peace. Firstly, for his life's work, which ultimately contributed to bringing about civilian service as an alternative to military service in Switzerland. Secondly for the various initiatives and the concrete action he took in the field; in particular organizing reconstruction work camps as early as 1920. As part of Ceresole's legacy, reconstruction work camps are still carried out to the present day. Most important of all, for his courage and selflessness, in tirelessly defending the fundamental values which are today the basis of human rights; values, such as freedom of expression, solidarity, tolerance, fraternity between humankind.*

*Although little-known in his own country Pierre Ceresole counts without doubt amongst the key Swiss personalities that have left their stamp on the history of ideas. Through the force of his personality and actions, strengthened by his convictions or his commitment to peace or non-violence, Ceresole personified the will to shake up the economic, social and religious proprieties of militaristic and conformist bourgeois Switzerland at the outbreak of World War I. Clearly and emphatically, he refused to be part of the society with which he no longer shared certain ideas of morality and justice. "For several years now - but more and more so since the beginning of the war - I no longer agree with the milieu which I was brought up in". Thus the war throws Ceresole into turmoil, forcing him first to break with the economic system, then with the social and professional worlds, and finally with the Church. Seeking truth and social justice, he had difficulty reconciling the discrepancies between words and deeds. He denounced the hypocrisy of warlike and totalitarian nations which lack moral and spiritual unity.*

*Moved by a spirit close to that of socialist ideals, Ceresole did not hesitate speaking out in public. His innovative discourse based on humanist, moral and spiritual values, which will guide him in throughout his life's work, left a lasting impression in the minds of those that knew him. He spent a good part of his life in teaching and this is where he probably found the most fertile ground for the spreading of his ideals. It is not surprising that he draws his inspiration from the principles of the Alternative School Movement ('la nouvelle école'). Similarly it is unsurprising that in 1926 he obtains a teaching post at the Grammar School in La Chaux de Fonds, a town where pacifist ideas are well established. However his appointment was not without considerable controversy. He spent about ten years in the Canton of Neuchâtel, during which time he gained some renown through fervent outbursts at political and anti militarist demonstrations.*

*Pierre Ceresole as a man of conviction and a pioneer of non-violence was one of those people who never give up. He travelled throughout Europe, Asia and America. He set up many work camps where volunteers rebuilt villages destroyed by catastrophes. Indisputably Ceresole was an exceptional character who has gained a special place in the history of pacifist movements. Looking back at what he achieved appears to us as an exceptional contribution to the desire for world peace. We sincerely wish that Ceresole's spirit will live on. Men like him, who dare to confront their contemporaries with their own contradictions, are rare indeed.*

*Like Ceresole himself, we have endeavoured to make this exhibition international in scope. Translated into German and English, it will be displayed in several countries where Ceresole helped in relief work. We hope this contribution will remind younger generations that the history of ideas and pacifism - which many unhesitatingly espouse - is part of a very long process. Even if we may today highlight its conquests, Ceresole was a major protagonist.*

*We would very much like to thank all those institutions, authors, translators and proofreaders, who have helped in the evolution of this exhibition and its accompanying brochure. We give particular thanks to Mme Sylvie Béguelin, curator of the special archive collections at the Municipal Library and Mr Philipp Rodriguez, archivist of the SCI as prime movers of this project, and to Mme Marilena Andrenacci for the layout of the brochure, Mr Michel Mégard and Mr Joel O'Neill for their contributions in writing the texts.*

Jacques-André Humair

Chief Librarian

La Chaux de Fonds Municipal Library.



# Biography



Pierre Ceresole was born in Lausanne to a family of Protestant notables. His father was Federal Councillor of the Swiss Federation. Pierre studied engineering and mathematics in Zurich and in Germany. Between 1909 and 1914, he travelled around the world. During the World War I, he publicly voiced his opposition to war. He

In 1919, Leonhard Ragaz invited him to a meeting of Christian Pacifists at Bilthoven in the Netherlands, and there he discovered the International Movement for Reconciliation and The Quakers. He made contact with people from different countries who, like him, wanted to engage in constructive action. Ceresole's international renown came via Service Civil International, which he set up when he organized the first work camp in Verdun (France), in 1920. In 1926, Ceresole was appointed to a post as a mathematics teacher in La Chaux-de-Fonds.

At the same time as teaching he organized numerous SCI projects in Switzerland, France, the United Kingdom and, in particular, India where he met Gandhi on many occasions. In 1936, he entered the Religious Society of Friends (The Quakers). Just before and during World War II he organized several demonstrations against militarism for which he was taken to court and sentenced to jail. He married Lise David in 1941, and died on the 23rd October 1945 after having been ill for several months.

consequently refused to pay 'Military Tax' for which he was sentenced to a day in prison. In Zurich in 1917, at the end of a service in the French Church, he spoke out vigorously to the crowd, encouraging them to dismiss "national idols".

<b>*17.08.1879</b>	Born in Lausanne (Switzerland), his father, Paul Ceresole, was Federal Councillor
<b>1897-1903</b>	Studies in engineering and mathematics at Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich, PhD in Science
<b>1905-1908</b>	Research in physics and mathematics in Germany
<b>1909-1914</b>	Journey round the world
<b>1915-1918</b>	Engineer at Brown Boveri (Baden)
<b>1919-1920</b>	Secretary of International Federation of Reconciliation
<b>1920-1934</b>	Organizer and coordinator of SCI work camps
<b>1920-1924</b>	Teacher at Quaker school in Gland
<b>1924-1925</b>	Secretary of Swiss Central Office for Peace Work in Zürich
<b>1926-1939</b>	Professor at grammar school in Chaux-de-Fonds
<b>1934-1937</b>	Relief projects for SCI in India
<b>1941</b>	Marriage with Lise David
<b>1942-1944</b>	Secretary of SCI
<b>+23.10.1945</b>	Died in Le Daley (Switzerland)



Work camp in Almens, 1926 (SCI)



# The forging of a personality (1879)

## His youth and family relationships

**His childhood is marked by the loss of his mother when he is only nine years old, leaving a profound emotional effect on him for the rest of his life.**

Founder of Service Civil International, Pierre Ceresole is a little-known figure in the history of Swiss and international pacifism. Born in Lausanne 17th August 1879 he was the ninth child of Paul Ceresole (1832 – 1905) lawyer, federal judge and former federal councillor, and Emma Ceresole, née Secretan (1841 ?-1888).

His childhood is marked by the loss of his mother when he is only nine years old, leaving a profound effect on him for the rest of his life. Later on, though a gifted young man, he has a poor self image and lacks confidence. Several years later, he refers to this tragedy in his diary, wondering whether he is actually capable of loving anyone at all:

« *When one is bereaved, words like “one has to die sometime...” are not enough to console us. Today, I do believe it would suffice in any circumstances, which means that I don’t love, and have never loved, anyone as I should, unless it was my mother, in the good old days before having the privilege of truly and consciously attaining adulthood.* » (Daniel Anet, *Pierre Ceresole, La passion de la paix*. Boudry: A la Baconnière, 1969, p. 25)

His elder sister Blanche, who is sixteen when their mother dies, instinctively takes on the maternal role so as to maintain affection and stability within the family. Throughout Pierre’s life, she remains an essential reference and confidente, even after her marriage to Dr.Gaston Châtenay

## Escaping to the New World

**To everyone’s amazement he turns down a professorship at the Zurich ‘Polytechnicum’; a chair in mathematics, which the renowned school hands him on a silver platter.**

In adolescence, Pierre’s sensitivity intensifies even more as he is wounded and tormented by existential questions. At the age of seventeen, whilst walking alone in Gantenaz Woods, he realizes what he would like to do in life. He decides to live a life without trickery, subterfuge or compromise; abandoning the conventional ways, mapped-out by the conservative middle-class. It is up to him to define and position himself with regards to his wishes and his skills. Self-denial becomes the fundament of his struggle, and action his creed. His spiritual development leads him to distance himself from official religious institutions, without however, putting into question the existence of God. He is trying to find his own path in life, clarifying his way of thinking, whilst

## Paul Ceresole (1832-1905) charismatic father

*Son of a Protestant church minister, Paul Ceresole becomes a lawyer after studying at the ‘Académie de Lausanne’. He starts his career in Vevey and Lausanne, whilst at the same time, pursuing a career in politics. He is the liberal party constituency leader for the Canton of Vaud. Between 1867 and 1870, he occupies the post of Federal Judge. He gains seats in legislative and executive elections, - first at a local then at a national level, becoming Federal Councillor in 1870. As President of the Confederation, he plays a prominent role during the ‘Kulturkampf’. After retiring from the Federal Council in 1875, he takes over the management of a new railway company, The Simplon Company, and works on the negotiations for the tunnelling operations. A committed soldier, he reaches the rank of Colonel, and commands the First Division (from 1878) and the First Army Corps (1892 – 1898).*



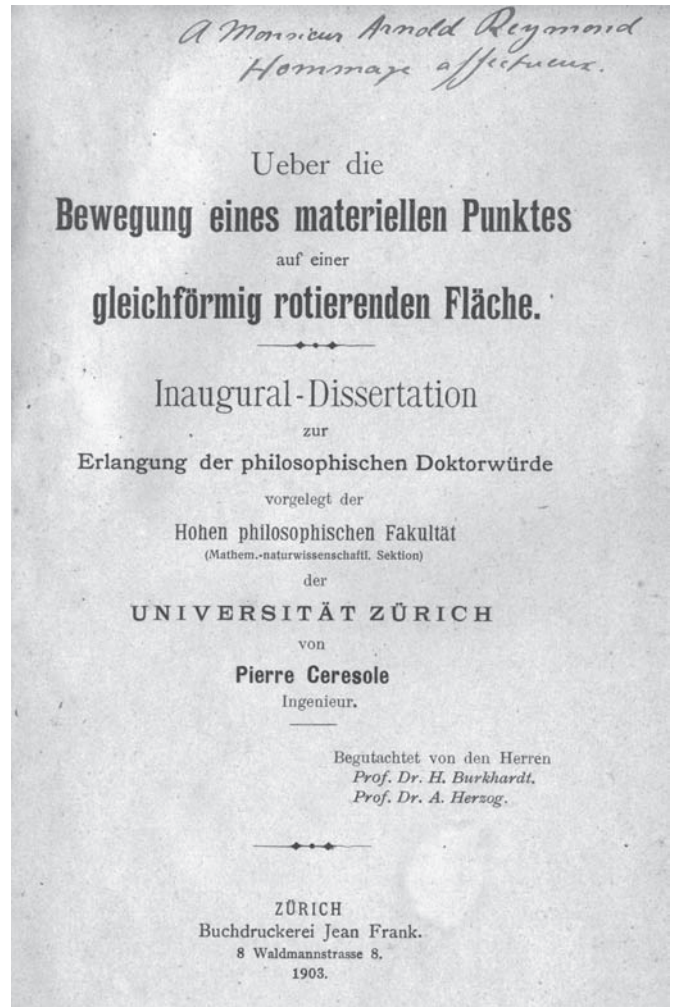
Paul Ceresole around 1900 (MHL)



erecting courage and truth as the essential virtues he strives to attain.

After finishing grammar school, he embarks upon a course in mechanical engineering at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich. In 1901, he is awarded his diploma with honours. A brilliant student, Pierre Ceresole is naturally drawn towards a PhD in Science, which he attains in 1903. This foreshadows a promising academic career, as he goes on to further study in Germany in the field of physics and mathematics. However, in March 1909, to everyone's amazement he turns down a professorship at the Zurich 'Polytechnicum'; a chair in mathematics, which the renowned school hands him on a silver platter. Following a suggestion from one of his brothers, he leaves and goes travelling. It is to be a journey that lasts five years, first in America, and then rounded out with a stay in Japan from 1913 on. Whilst travelling the length and breadth of the United States from east to west, he turns his hand to all sorts of trades, both manual and intellectual, thus becoming something of a complete all-rounder. He discovers life, and society, and becomes a more well-balanced individual attaining a certain inner peace. He is convinced that he will be able to make a modest contribution to improving the world:

*« If I only strive for noble and great things, I don't see why I shouldn't obtain them. Thinking it over, I am even sure of obtaining them; for with a noble vision of life, whatever comes about is the required result. »* (Pierre Ceresole, *Vivre sa Vérité*. Boudry: A la Baconnière, 1949, p. 17)



Pierre Ceresole's PhD thesis, 1903 (SCI)

The Ceresole children around 1882 (BCUL)



Pierre Ceresole and his 'Collège' friends, 1901 (BCUL)



*The Ceresole children, around 1900 (BCUL)*



*Pierre Ceresole on board ship bound for Honolulu (BCUL)*



# Moving towards conscientious objection (1914)

## In the torment of war

**Faced with the human disaster that is looming, all the international pacifist associations are mobilized into action.**

Pierre returns to Switzerland at the outbreak of the World War I. Reinforced in his ideal of a life of hard work helping others, he donates his personal wealth to the Swiss state, in the form of 48 Nestlé shares, worth 400 Swiss Francs each, which he has been bequeathed by his father. He wants to earn his own living, avoiding relying on any form of acquired family inheritance. A few months later he is taken on as an engineer by Brown Boveri in Baden.

*« 12th November 1914. I herewith send you the shares I have inherited from my father; hoping that current events will suffice in explaining the reason for this restitution, without any further comment. I believe that Christ's teachings - as the State still has them preached in hundreds of churches today - are superior to the recommendations of political realism and good business sense, and -in the long run- are more practical. Please use this money in whatever way you consider to be in accordance with the above... Attached documents: 48 Nestlé shares. »* (Hélène Monastier, *Pierre Ceresole d'après sa correspondance*. Neuchâtel: A la Baconnière, 1960, p. 9)

Faced with the human disaster that is looming, all the international pacifist associations get mobilized. Those linked to the 'Peace through Rights' movement - a middle-class pacifism of 'liberal' inspiration which defends the stabilizing of the existing order by reinforcing international legislation<sup>1</sup> - or the working class movement - a more radical form of pacifism which demands a thorough reshaping of the entire socio-economic order, and which has a Christian-Social wing. In June 1915, the country is shaken by the pioneer case of a young primary school teacher, John Baudraz from the canton Vaud who refused to continue serving in the Swiss army on the grounds of conscientious objection. First his imprisonment, then his trial, provoke a lot of debate, in the religious press - L'Essor and the Semeur Vaudois and, before long, in the secular media. Pierre Ceresole takes a distinct liking to this profound and sincere man who dares stick to his convictions.

*« Since respectable people have locked Baudraz up... it seems to me that official lying is at its epitome, and I feel I have something to say. »* (Hélène Monastier, op. cit. p. 17)

1 See: Christophe Stawarz, *La paix à l'épreuve*, La Chaux-de-Fonds 1880-1914, p.11.

## Making speeches in Lausanne and Zurich

**Pierre Ceresole feels the need to follow up in a more direct way by taking concrete action.**

Out of his feelings of solidarity with Baudraz, Pierre organizes a meeting on 29th January 1916 at the Salle Centrale in Lausanne, to which he invites his friends to come and discuss religion and patriotism. Before a small audience he steps up onto the platform, pallid and over-whelmed with emotion; he only manages to blurt out one single sentence:

*« The worst thing in the present war, is the lying that brought it about. »* (Hélène Monastier, op. cit. p. 17)

A difficult experience for the speaker who takes it as a personal failure; nevertheless his audience is touched by his attempt. Supported by his friend the church minister Maurice Vuilleumier - a fervent defender of conscientious objectors - he feels the need to follow up in a more direct way by taking concrete action. 16th July 1916, just after John Baudraz has been convicted for the second time, Ceresole refuses to pay his military tax. The District of Baden tribunal sentences him to a day in jail, which he serves in March 1917. Strengthened in his convictions, once again he longs to express them publicly. So, he invites his friends to the Salle Centrale in Lausanne on 2nd May 1917. It is not to go back to square one that he mounted the rostrum, but to get things on the move; ushering in a long series of meetings, debates, lectures and public demonstrations to defend the pacifist cause, fully supported by the Christian Socialists.

*« ... Zurich, Sunday 22nd April 1917. Yesterday I found out that Artillery Lieutenant Kleiber of Battery N°70 has been sentenced to four months in jail. It appears to me that the time has come ... I intend to ask my friends to support us and to join in this peaceful revolution. Everyone should go as far as he can. »* (Hélène Monastier, op. cit. p. 19)

On 4th November 1917, at the French Church in Zurich, with the permission of William Cuendet, the church minister, Ceresole makes a speech at the end of the service. The text he reads accuses the Church head on, of fostering two lies he can no longer condone: that of the 'Christian soldier', and that of the 'rich Christian'. In the congregation, a certain René Bovard, like the rest of the congregation, receives the message with some agitation. Pierre's charisma has its effect, and he makes quite a strong impression. The local newspapers spread the news of the scandal, which Ceresole himself describes as «very painful». He emerges relieved from this episode: he has dared speak out frankly, breaking with the hypocrisy prevalent amongst those who call themselves 'Christians'.



## John Baudraz (1890-1968) The first soldier to become a conscientious objector

Born 28th May 1890 in Agiez, a wine-growing and farming district of Orbe, John Baudraz stems from a family belonging to the 'Free Church'. He is brought up in piousness and to love his neighbor as himself. He trains as a primary school teacher, and receives a post in Lucens. In June 1915, after having done his Army induction course, and several training sessions, he refuses to return to his company. Put under arrest, he is first of all taken to the prison in Morges, and then to the mental hospital in Céry, where he stays from 25th June to 24th July. There he writes a report setting out the reasons for his act of insubordination, in which he simply refers to the bible with fervour and sincerity, without alluding to any philosophical doctrine, or any political or religious movement. Out of honesty, he resigns from his teaching duties. The Free Church of Missy appoints him to a post in its private school. In August 1915, he is first sentenced to four months in jail, and deprived of his voting rights. In July 1916, he receives a further sentence of five months for having repeated his refusal to serve in the army. John Baudraz is finally declared to be suffering from "serious neurasthe-

nia", and therefore medically unfit for call up. In 1922, he is reinstated into the official teaching staff in Missy. To bear witness to his experience, he publishes a brochure entitled *Réfractaire*, of which he distributes a few dozen copies. This is his only act of proselytizing, because lacking in self-confidence, he does not want to assume the role of leader. On the other hand, his decision to object to military service forces the Army to position itself with regards to defaulters, and a draft bill for the modifying of military penal law is submitted to the Federal Council in 1917-18. His case shakes the 'clear conscience' of many Christians, whether church going or not, as well as clergymen. This launches the idea of a 'civilian service' for conscientious objectors with the first petition appearing in December 1922.



Home of John Baudraz in Agiez (Private Collection)

Woodcut by Frans Masereel, issue n°10 of  
"Les Tablettes", No.10, 1917 (BVCF)





Extract from John Baudraz's letter to Jules Humbert-Droz (1889-1971), church minister and militant communist, later a socialist, who was a defaulter, and jailed in 1917 (BVCF)

A demonstration poster, La Chaux de Fonds, 1917 (BVCF)

*Je m'aperçois, par les journaux  
que vous combattez fort et ferme et  
que vous avez beaucoup à supporter. Que  
Dieu vous garde dans l'humilité.  
Quant à moi, je reste toujours tran-  
quille dans mon coin, bien occupé, il  
est vrai par mes leçons. Mais je sais  
qu'il y en a qui s'étonnent de ce que  
je ne fasse pas de propagande, peut-  
être en êtes-vous. C'est que, pour le  
moment, je ne m'y sens pas appelé,  
je ne sais pas parler en public et  
suis un mauvais écrivain. Puis,*

**MANIFESTATION**  
ce soir à 8<sup>h</sup>12 heures au Temple Communal

**SUJET :**  
**Politique fédérale  
Affaire Hoffmann-Grimm  
Arrestations des réfractaires  
Tribunaux militaires**

**ORATEURS :** PAUL GOLAY, député à Lausanne,  
E.-PAUL GRABER, Conseiller national,  
WILLIAM COSANDIER,  
ALEXIS VAUCHER.

**Rendez-vous sur la Place de l'Ouest à 8 h. précises**

La PERSÉVÉRANTE partira du CERCLE OUVRIER à 7<sup>h</sup>45 heures

Tous les citoyens qui veulent protester contre la politique néfaste suivie par nos gouvernements, tant à Neuchâtel qu'à Berne, et spécialement contre les arrestations arbitraires des réfractaires arrachés brutalement à leurs familles, se joindront en masse au cortège

**PARTI SOCIALISTE.**

Ceresole's appeal, read out at the Salle Centrale in Lausanne, 1917 (BVCF)

Jules Humbert-Droz's thesis, 1914 (BVCF)

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EDITION DE LA FÉDÉRATION ROMANDE  
DES SOCIALISTES CHRÉTIENS

N° 1

**Religion et Patriotisme**

Dernier recours  
lu à la Salle Centrale à Lausanne  
le 2 mai 1917.

PIERRE CERESOLE

Lausanne. Imprimerie la Concorde  
1917

Aug. Lalive prof.  
LE *La Chaux-de-Fonds*

**CHRISTIANISME**

ET LE

**SOCIALISME**

LEURS OPPOSITIONS ET LEURS RAPPORTS

THÈSE DE LICENCE EN THÉOLOGIE  
PRÉSENTÉE ET SOUTENUE À L'UNIVERSITÉ DE NEUCHÂTEL  
PAR  
JULES HUMBERT-DROZ

LA CHAUX-DE-FONDS  
IMPRIMERIE COOPÉRATIVE  
1914





## Pacifist contacts

### **Pierre Ceresole cultivates close relations with the local pacifist network.**

Bearing witness in words and in writing: the pacifist propaganda campaign lead by Pierre Ceresole carries on, and reaches a certain audience in Switzerland through the press and lectures. On several occasions, he speaks in the canton of Neuchâtel: in 1917 during a two-day event organized by the Christian Socialists, along with Charles Naine and Jules Humbert-Droz; also in 1922 when promoting the petition in favour of a civilian service. Ceresole cultivates close relations with the local pacifist network, which, at one and the same time, is derived from the Workers movement and the Christian movement.

« Zurich, 14th March 1925. In La Chaux de Fonds, a magnificent hall of 600-700 people. I spoke about *Someo* and then disarmament... But the really memorable event was after the lecture when the Head of the Grammar School and the Teacher Training College came and asked me if I would agree to speak to the pupils about whatever I felt like [...]. And so I did. The next morning about 120 young people filled the school's biggest hall, and I spoke simply, but very seriously, on issues that we are particularly concerned about: refusing to do military service, the Quakers etc. Without hiding anything at all. They all listened very attentively and with distinct sympathy for what I had to say. I was very impressed and very much encouraged by this meeting. » (Hélène Monastier, *Pierre Ceresole d'après sa correspondance*. Neuchâtel: A la Baconnière, 1960, p. 54)

## Changing the teaching of History

### **After World War I the teaching of History takes on considerable importance.**

On the advice of a teacher, Edmond Privat, the Head of the Grammar School, August Lalive, gets back in touch with Pierre Ceresole at the beginning of 1926. He needs to find someone for the post of History teacher, and ardently desires bringing about a radical change in the teaching of the subject. He is looking for someone with real personality, «a capable person with modern leanings, (socialist if possible, or a progressive – pro League of Nations), charismatic, antimilitarist, antinationalist, and truly understanding» (Extract from a letter to Edmond Privat, 27th December 1925). Privat himself has been approached first of all, but he turns it down as he is not available.

After World War I, the teaching of History takes on considerable importance. Rather than have his pupils capable of reeling off the exploits of national heroes, and mentioning glorious events, the kind of teaching methods Auguste Lalive has his heart set on for his school, have to be founded on the principles of solidarity, and brotherliness between all races, all peoples and all men. The new teacher would have to be

someone who would embody the principles of the new teaching methods disseminated in Switzerland by Adolphe Ferrière, and supported by the psychologist Edouard Claparède – who advocates active methods based on experience and learning from reality. Faced with a divided selection committee, and also to give more weight to his proposal to appoint Pierre Ceresole to the chair in History, Lalive – himself a staunch supporter of these new educational precepts – requests a recommendation from Claparède.

« *Once again, the school needs the benefit of your wisdom, of your advice. [ ... ] Presently our History lessons are taught by a dozen or so different teachers, and it goes without saying that the teaching lacks the necessary degree of unity. I am also finding it difficult to introduce the new trends and methods; the 'new spirit' we talked a lot about at the Geneva Congress in 1922. The time has come for us to take an important step forward; we need a History teacher who is different to the 'run of the mill', someone who is unfettered of all nationalist prejudices and totally won over to the ideal of the League of Nations, and the principles accepted by the Moral Education Congress in 1922. I think I have found the person we need, in Mr Pierre Ceresole who is prepared to accept an appointment here.* » (Extract from Lalive's letter to E. Claparède, 23rd January 1926)

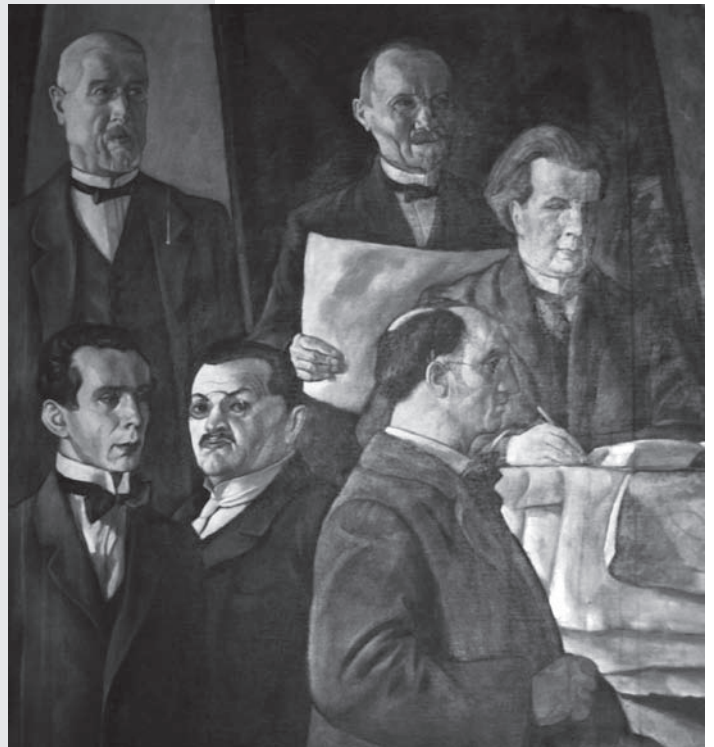
## Controversy over an appointment to the Grammar School

### **The School Selection Committee appoints Ceresole to the post of History teacher. Reaction is immediately hostile: teachers and pupils go on strike.**

In fact, Ceresole's application poses a problem as, even though he has a PhD and a diploma in engineering, he has not studied social sciences. On 4th March 1926, by 21 votes for and 20 against, the La Chaux de Fonds School Selection Committee appoints Pierre Ceresole to the post of History teacher. Reaction is immediately hostile: teachers and pupils go on strike, polemical articles appear in the local press, and parents get up a petition. The pressure mounts; the bourgeois establishment accuses the socialists of political manoeuvring in order to get their ideas into the classroom. Finally, on 24th March 1926 the Neuchâtel State Council settles the question by rejecting the appointment. To save the situation somewhat, and so as not to miss the opportunity of having a prestigious pacifist on his staff, Lalive reshuffles certain posts and the teaching of certain subjects – especially mathematics; it is in this subject that, in the end, Lalive suggests appointing Ceresole. In May 1926 both the School Selection Committee, and the Neuchâtel State Council accept the proposition. Until 1939, Ceresole fulfills his teaching duties at the La Chaux de Fonds Grammar School; benefiting from a lightened workload whenever needed to fit in with his many commitments and travels for the Service Civil International. Auguste Lalive has become his faithful friend and supporter, which he remains throughout his career.

## Auguste Lalive (1878 – 1944) Humanist teaching methods

Born in Fribourg, son of a rather radical architect, Auguste Lalive is still a child when he moves to La Chaux de Fonds. He attends the Technical High School, and then obtains a diploma in Mathematics at 'Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale'. From 1900 on, he teaches this subject at La Chaux de Fonds Grammar School, where he is promoted to the position of Headmaster, a post he holds from 1918 till 1943. Rigorous and of a strong assertive character, he strives to insure his students obtain a wide-ranging general knowledge, both scientific and literary. He finds an orchestra as well as a choir, and encourages amateur dramatics, entrusting the writer and professor Jean Paul Zimmerman (1889 -1953) with stage-directing plays. Lalive also encourages writing by bringing about the creation of the student magazine *Herbes Folles* (Wild Grass). Politically committed, a man of the left, he is a Socialist Party Federal Councillor from 1912 to 1916, then member of parliament three times between 1922 and 1934. He launches the "Almanach Socialiste" in 1922, and is its editor. Interested in the principles of 'The New School' ( 'l'école nouvelle' ) he abolishes rigid marking and introduces more nuanced grading. A fervent advocate of sports; and founder member of La Chaux de Fonds FC, he actively campaigns against alcoholism, and develops physical education in his establishment. On retiring, he moves to Geneva where his children live.



Teachers of the Grammar School, in the middle on the right, Auguste Lalive. Painting by Charles Humbert, 1922-1925 (BVCF)



Procession at the end of the school year, July 1927. Pierre Ceresole is on the right in the first row, behind the drummer (SCI)





*Pierre Ceresole with the Lalive family on an excursion to the Doubs, 1930 (SCI)*



*Bacheliers 1932. Auguste Lalive is standing (BVCF)*



*Work camp in Lagarde (France) in 1930. On the right, Pierre Ceresole and Auguste Lalive (SCI)*



# The first peace work camp (1920)

## The International Conference in Bilthoven (The Netherlands)

### Appointed to advocate international reconciliation, Ceresole suggests a fraternal work camp.

In the summer of 1919 the well-known theologian and pacifist Leonhard Ragaz invites Ceresole to a Peace Conference in Bilthoven (The Netherlands), where several Christian pacifists have founded the Federation of Reconciliation. At the conference, Ceresole meets many like-minded people and future companions. He is especially impressed by the pacifist tradition of the Quakers, a denomination of which he will become a member seventeen years later.

Due to his extensive language skills, he is elected conference secretary. Appointed to advocate international reconciliation, he suggests a fraternal work camp, which should be organized in a similar manner to the reconstruction work of the Quakers in Poland and in France. At the second conference of the Federation of Reconciliation, which is again held in Bilthoven at the end of July 1920, his suggestion finds great support. A German declares to the conference, that he would like to help repairing war damage, as his brother, who was a soldier, had contributed to the devastation in Northern France. Inspired by this, after the conference, Ceresole decides to travel to Germany to find participants for his project.

## The project in Esnes near Verdun (France)

### Getting together a group of foreign volunteers working for peace is no less paradoxical than assembling a foreign legion to go to war.

The English Quaker Hubert Parris, who has experience in organizing relief work supports Ceresole in preparing the project. In the autumn of 1920, they travel to an area in north-eastern France, where the war had taken an extremely bad toll. The authorities give them permission to carry out a reconstruction project in the village of Esnes with German participation.

Esnes had been completely destroyed during the battle of Verdun in 1916. The reconstruction team intends to build emergency accommodation for the farmers. In the middle of the

Groupede Service International,  
Secy, Pierre Ceresole Esnes par Dombasle en  
Group Leader, Hubert B. Parris Argonne  
Meuse, France?

Application form for Service:

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Occupation \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Age \_\_\_\_\_ Date of birth \_\_\_\_\_ Married or single? \_\_\_\_\_  
Where educated \_\_\_\_\_

For what period are you prepared to serve, & how soon free? \_\_\_\_\_

Name & address of nearest relative \_\_\_\_\_  
What are your special reasons for applying? \_\_\_\_\_

Please name two references (not relatives) who have known you for at least two years, with addresses \_\_\_\_\_

Have you been abroad? Where? \_\_\_\_\_

Knowledge of French or other foreign language \_\_\_\_\_

Present and previous occupations, mentioning duration; Experience of camp life, domestic or social work, craft, trade, or useful hobby; (any experience should be mentioned even though its bearing on our work may not be evident) \_\_\_\_\_

Can you drive or repair a Motor? \_\_\_\_\_  
Can you bring a motor cycle or cycle with you? \_\_\_\_\_  
General health. (If in doubt as to physical fitness for rough outdoor life please consult a medical man) \_\_\_\_\_  
Working equipment will be provided where necessary, by the Group, unless as is to be desired, the applicant indicates that this in whole or in part is not necessary. \_\_\_\_\_

A small equal pocket-money allowance is made to all. Would you require a special separation allowance for your dependants (if any)? \_\_\_\_\_  
It is intended to try and make the work self supporting when fully established. Are you prepared to contribute to the initial expenses? \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

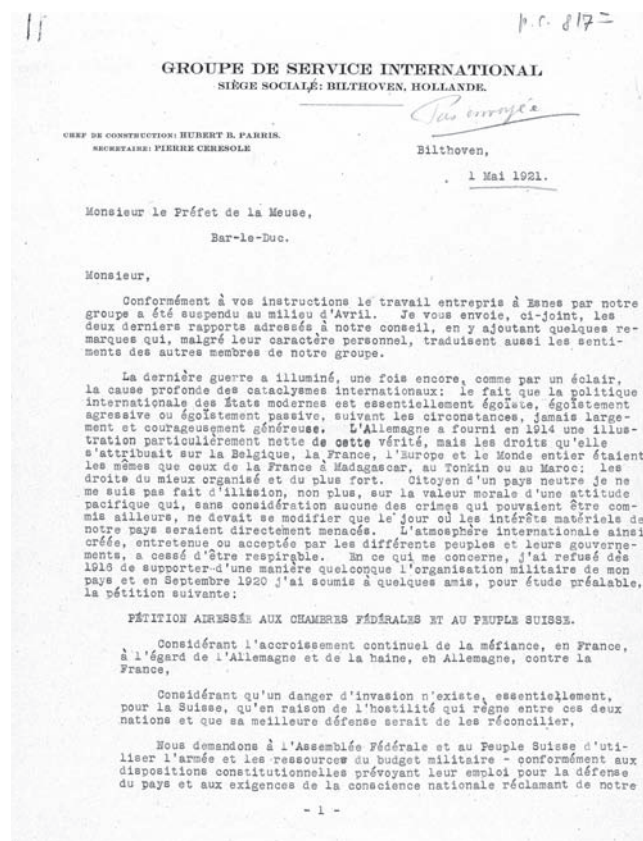
Application form for volunteers 1920 (BCUL)

Pierre Ceresole and two volunteers  
in front of the huts, winter 1920/1921  
(BCUL)



icy November of 1920, Ceresole and Parris start building a shelter for the volunteers who will be arriving in December.

During the winter months, the volunteers build several huts for the village. Already in January the working conditions deteriorate, the volunteers' mission becomes more demanding. The French government reduces the funds for the building material and in March, the Prefect of the Département de la Meuse bars the mayor of Esnes from allocating work to the volunteers. The reasons for this are to be found in the difficult political circumstances of the time, as the negotiations concerning the German war reparations have just failed. But the Prefect's decision does not prevent the volunteers from continuing helping the farmers, who appreciate their work. In addition, a neighbouring village puts forward a new agricultural reconstruction project. Subsequently the rapport with the local population worsens. The continuation of the relief work is now subject to a condition imposed by the authorities, namely, that the German volunteers leave the area. Driven by his desire to achieve reconciliation, Ceresole does not want to comply. The team finishes its work in the middle of April 1921 and leaves.



After his departure, Ceresole writes to the Prefect of the Département de la Meuse, arguing in favour of future peace projects, 1.May 1921 (BCUL)



View of Esnes in 1922.

The huts which were built by volunteers in the winter of 1920/1921 can be seen in the foreground on the left (BCUL)





## Ceresole and the Quakers

*Pierre Ceresole's standpoint on matters has isolated him; he often feels lonely and misunderstood. At the inaugural meeting of the International Federation of Reconciliation in 1919, for the very first time, he finds himself amongst a group of like-minded people, including several Quakers, one of whom, Henry Hodgkin is co-founder of the movement. From then on, Ceresole has permanent links with the Quaker movement: he teaches in a school run by a British Quaker, founds the SCI with the support of the Quaker Hubert Parris, meets the Geneva group of Quakers, and in 1931 his friend H el ene Monastier becomes a member of the Quakers. His simple way of live, his social commitment, his religion of the Spirit makes Ceresole himself an excellent candidate for membership.*

*On the other hand, something which no doubt de-*

*lays his becoming a member, is that he is rather "ill at ease with every kind of arrangement ... by which one is supposed to be brought closer to God" including the Quakers' silent services. Later he is quite happy to be accepted into the Religious Society of Friends (the Quakers' official name). Like other Swiss people, Ceresole comes to Quakerism because - among other things - he feels that no one accepts him, or even takes any notice of him, in the Protestant Church. He immediately plays an important role in Quakerism. Coming back from his work in Bihar, he stops over in Philadelphia and takes part in an international meeting of Quakers, where he presides over the session devoted to the state of the world. Between 1939 and 1944, he supports H el ene Monastier at the head of the Swiss Quakers. Despite his declining health, he takes part in several conferences and committees up to November 1944.*



**ELINED KOTSCHNIG (WALES), WALTER KOTSCHNIG (AUSTRIA), BLANCHE W. SHAFFER AND PIERRE CERESOLE (SWITZERLAND), BERTRAM PICKARD (ENGLAND), AT FRIENDS WORLD CONFERENCE**

*Group photo of Swiss Quakers at the Swarthmore Conference, Pennsylvania, 1937. ("Quakerism in Switzerland", 1944)*





# The founding of the Service Civil International (1924)

## Petition for a national civilian service

**Men who refuse to do military service for reasons of conscience should be allowed to do an alternative kind of service.**

After the first work camp in France, Ceresole obtains a position at a newly opened private school in Gland, situated on Lake Geneva. Using alternative teaching methods he teaches French, German, Esperanto, mathematics and science. He continues to get involved in the implementation of a civilian service. Men who refuse to do military service for reasons of conscience should, in his opinion, be allowed to do an alternative kind of service. Together with Leonhard Ragaz and other pacifists, Ceresole launches a petition with this as its objective. Signed by 40,000 people, they submit it to the parliament in Berne in 1923.

## A voluntary civilian service

**Ceresole searches amongst like-minded people for volunteers to participate in a 'civilian service'.**

In order to gain support for his petition, Ceresole searches amongst like-minded people for volunteers to participate in

a 'civilian service' in the summer of 1924, as required in the petition. In Les Ormonts in the alpine area of canton Vaud, he finds a suitable location for implementing his plans. During the previous winter, an avalanche had covered a house and its grounds with rocks, mud and tree-trunks. The village accepts Ceresole's offer to help and supplies accommodation and tools. From the 7th to the 28th of August, a dozen committed male and female pacifists - among them H  l  ne Monastier and John Baudraz - participate in the first voluntary work camp.

Shortly after the work in Les Ormonts, there is a landslide in the canton of Ticino at Maggiatal, leaving ten casualties and destroying several houses in the village of Someo. The organizers of Les Ormonts spontaneously decide to summon another work camp. Although the summer holidays are over, more than 300 volunteers answer the call to support the population of Someo. One of the participants, Fritz Schmid, writes the following:

*A leaflet flew into my house ... "volunteers for Someo"!! It's impossible for me, I thought. Then, at the bottom of the page, I discovered a few words written in a friend's handwriting: "Come, even if it is impossible for you". An evening and a*



*Pierre Ceresole and volunteers clearing debris during the 'civilian service' at Les Ormonts (Vaud, Switzerland), 1924 (SCI)*



morning passed. "We have to show the mighty gentlemen in Berne that a 'civilian service' really is possible. By the evening of the next day, I had made up my mind: Off to Someo! (Hélène Monastier: *Someo, Centre Suisse d'Action pour la Paix*, 1925)

Under the leadership of Pierre and Ernest Ceresole, from October to December, the volunteers clear the village of Someo of debris and rocks as well as building new flood walls. The organizers impose an army-like discipline and routine; in this way they want to prove that 'civilian service' really is an equivalent to military service. Although these first two 'civilian service' work camps in Switzerland are successful, the government and parliament reject Ceresole and Ragaz's petition at the end of 1924.

## The Swiss Central Office for Peace Work

### Ceresole vehemently expresses an anti-military point of view all over Switzerland.

Even before the 'civilian service' petition was rejected, the organizers decided to found a Swiss Central Office for Peace Work in order to continue supporting 'civilian service' and disarmament. Ceresole is elected secretary and, from now on, he works in the house of the Ragaz family at Gartenhofstrasse 7 in Zurich. He participates in many events all over Switzerland and vehemently expresses an anti-military point of view. He personally distributes leaflets to soldiers, inciting them to refuse doing military service:

« Do your military service as long as your conscience considers it necessary. Under no circumstances refuse to do it because you are in a bad mood or weary. But, if you hear the call of which we are the echo, then obey it ! » (Pierre Ceresole, *Avertissement à nos soldats*. La Chaux-de-Fonds, 1925)

## Leonhard Ragaz (1868 - 1945) a theologian for socialist pacifism

After having studied theology, and becoming a priest, Ragaz worked in different Swiss towns, and was concerned with the condition of the working class. In 1906, he was one of the founding members of the Religious Social Movement and of the magazine *Neue Wege*. From 1908 to 1921, he was professor of theology at the University of Zurich. He moved to the working-class suburb of Zürich-Aussersihl, where he was in charge of educating the working class. In 1924, the Swiss Central Office for Peace Work was set up in his house at Gartenhofstrasse. Ceresole worked there as secretary of the organization until 1926. Ragaz represented a theology, which was strongly inspired by the concept of the 'Kingdom of God', which advocates pacifism and religious socialism, which also influenced Ceresole. In 1919, Ragaz invited Ceresole to attend the first conference of the Federation of Reconciliation in Bilthoven.



Pierre Ceresole (3rd f.l.) and Leonhard Ragaz (4th f.l.), at the Reconciliation Conference in Bad Boll in 1924. Also in the picture, Hélène Monastier (4th from the right.) (SCI)



1926 ?

## AVERTISSEMENT A NOS SOLDATS

Tu es soldat, cher Confédéré, et convaincu de l'être uniquement pour défendre la Patrie. Tous les soldats de tous les pays croient, de bonne foi, la même chose.

Chacun, dans chaque pays, se figure qu'il est soldat pour protéger, par exemple, en cas de nécessité, sa mère, sa femme, sa sœur contre les violences des ennemis.

Quand est-elle donc menacée, la sécurité des femmes, à notre époque et dans notre partie du monde ? Elle l'est, sauf de rares exceptions, uniquement en temps de guerre, lorsque les armées sont déchaînées.

Les femmes sont sérieusement menacées parce que des armées peuvent entrer en conflit, parce qu'il existe des armées, parce que toi-même, exactement comme tous les soldats de tous les pays et dans le même esprit, tu consens à te faire l'instrument docile du système actuel de préparation militaire.

Si jamais ta mère, ta fiancée ou ta sœur courent, en temps de guerre, un danger sérieux, ce sera ta faute aussi.

La majorité de notre peuple croit que l'armée est indispensable. Qu'est-ce que ça prouve ? Avant 1914, les Allemands, unanimes, croyaient, eux aussi, et plus fermement encore, que l'armée était la seule garantie possible de la sécurité et de la prospérité nationales. En fait, elle leur a apporté, malgré sa perfection technique, la ruine et l'humiliation. Nous retrouvons chez nous le même préjugé. Il nous expose aux mêmes conséquences.

On le répète de tous les côtés qu'en accomplissant consciencieusement ce qu'on appelle le « devoir militaire », tu acquiers un droit à notre reconnaissance.

Convaincus d'exprimer les sentiments de milliers d'autres Confédérés, les soussignés déclarent ici, solennellement, qu'ils te considèrent aujourd'hui, soldat, non pas comme une protection mais comme un danger pour notre pays lui-même.

Si, après la dernière guerre, tu peux encore trouver ta joie dans le simulacre de lueres du

service militaire, soit, garde cette joie. Quant à nos remerciements, nous te les apporterons de grand cœur, le jour où tu renonceras à nous défendre par le procédé actuel et où tu laisseras, ainsi, la confiance renaître dans le monde.

Nous te disons cela, non pour l'irriter, pour l'exciter contre qui que ce soit, ou dans un but politique quelconque — le soldat de l'armée rouge nous paraît aussi dangereux que toi — nous le disons uniquement, en obéissant à une nécessité impérieuse, pour prévenir par tous les moyens la catastrophe que toi et tous les soldats du monde êtes en train d'attirer sur nous.

Fais ton service aussi longtemps que ta conscience l'exige. Ne le refuse en aucun cas dans un moment de mauvaise humeur ou de fatigue, mais si tu entends, en toi-même, la voix dont nous sommes ici l'écho, obéis-lui !

Un grand nombre de bons citoyens comprennent aujourd'hui ces difficultés et sont prêts à l'appuyer moralement devant l'opinion. Avec notre cordial salut confédéré.

Centre suisse d'action pour la Paix.

Jugendgemeinschaft „Nie wieder Krieg“.

Jugendorganisation „Freischar“.

Section suisse de la Ligue internationale des Femmes pour la Paix et la Liberté.

[Veuillez adresser toute communication relative à ce manifeste à Pierre Ceresole, Gartenhofstrasse 7, Zurich.]

[Tous les citoyens ou groupes de citoyens qui comprennent et approuvent cet avertissement sont priés de le reproduire, de l'envoyer ou de le distribuer aux soldats qu'ils connaissent. Ils peuvent, sans autre, ajouter leurs signatures à celles qui précèdent ou s'entendre avec d'autres citoyens pour compléter ou remplacer, à volonté, ces signatures par d'autres, toujours accompagnées d'une adresse.]

## Aux amis du Service Civil

Zurich, Gartenhofstrasse 7.  
Le 16 octobre 1924.

Chers amis,

Le service civil de Vers l'Eglise est à peine terminé. C'est sous la même enveloppe que nous apportons nos remerciements à ceux qui nous ont soutenus pour cette première campagne — et nous voici irrésistiblement lancés dans une nouvelle entreprise!

Je n'insiste pas sur la gravité de ce nouveau départ. Nous ne réussirons que si chacun est prêt à de très grands sacrifices. Que chacun — suivant l'exemple de notre ami B. qui a lancé le premier appel pour ce nouvel effort — ou bien demande un congé, ou prenne un à compte sur ses vacances de l'année prochaine, ou obtienne de son université ou de son école la permission de ne rentrer que plus tard, ou tâche de remettre son commerce, son train de campagne, son bureau ou ses fonctions pour quinze jours au moins à un collègue ou à des voisins de bonne volonté.

Pour les amis du service civil, en Suisse, dans les conditions actuelles, l'appel ci-joint est un ordre de mobilisation émanant non pas des hommes qui l'ont signé mais de l'esprit que nous voulons tous servir. Cette conviction seule nous autorise à envisager une entreprise aussi difficile.

La difficulté unique et très grande est de se libérer au moment précis ou le travail régulier d'une bonne partie d'entre nous reprend ou va reprendre.

Sur le terrain, à Someo, on nous attend. La subsistance, cette fois, est assurée, en partie, par les autorités et les contributions de nos amis suffiront à ce qui est encore nécessaire.

Venez, appelez tous ceux que vous connaissez. Faites librement l'effort qui s'imposerait un jour à des millions d'hommes dans des conditions atroces, pour une mobilisation de guerre, si nous n'accomplissons pas le besogne qui nous est confiée.

Affectueux à vous.

Pierre Ceresole  
Venez-les ?

Ceresole's controversial leaflet which invites soldiers to refuse to do military service, 1925 (SCI)

Ceresole's appeal for a voluntary civilian service. A few weeks after the landslide in Someo (Ticino, Switzerland), 1924 (SCI)



A etching by Anton Wohler, who participated a work camp in the 1920s (SCI)





## International expansion

**1928 more than 700 volunteers from over 20 countries respond to his call to help Liechtenstein.**

When lecturing for the Central Office for Peace Work, Pierre Ceresole talks about the voluntary work camps in Someo and Les Ormonts. He emphasizes that it is not enough to simply say 'No' to war. A more advanced form of international coexistence, based on mutual help and trust, is necessary. The national 'civilian service' should therefore become an 'international civilian service':

« We hope that the 'civilian service', developing gradually on an international basis, will contribute to turning our foreign neighbours into friends, whom we would be ashamed of mistrusting. » (Pierre Ceresole, *Service Civil Volontaire*, Almens 1926. Zurich: Centre Suisse d'Action pour la Paix, 1926, p.41)

At the end of 1927, the river Rhine floods large areas of Liechtenstein, leaving vast amounts of mud and debris. The damage for the local population is huge, as nearly all the cultivated land has been lost. This time Ceresole appeals for volunteers, not only from Switzerland, but also from abroad. In 1928, more than 700 volunteers from over 20 countries respond to his call to help the population and remove the debris. The experience in Liechtenstein and the enthusiasm of the volunteers becomes a model for future work camps, which from 1930 onwards are also carried out in France, Great Britain and other countries. Finally this leads to the founding of the Service Civil International (SCI), which now has members in many other countries. The spade with the broken sword and the word PAX (peace) become the logo of the organization.

**Oeffentl. Versammlung**  
 Freitag, den 7. Juli 1922, abends punkt 8 Uhr  
 im großen Saale des Volkshauses

**Der  
 Zivildienst**

**Referenten: Pierre Cérésolle · Klara Honegger**  
 Freie Diskussion

**Erste Vortragende: Herman Greulich, Nat.-Rat / H. Neumann, Freischar**

Es handelt sich um die Forderung des Zivildienstes an Stelle des Militärdienstes für solche, die aus Gewissensgründen den Militärdienst verweigern müssen. Wer der Überzeugung ist, daß der Kampf gegen Krieg und Militarismus mit äußerster Energie wieder aufgenommen werden sollte, ist eingeladen, an der Versammlung teilzunehmen.

Arbeitsgemeinschaft für soziale u. geistige Neuorientierung; Frauenliga für Friede u. Freiheit; Jugendorganisation Freischar; Weltfriedensbund der Jugend

Ceresole, in Zurich talking about the 'civilian service' petition, 1922 (Sozialarchiv)

1931

ASSOCIATION  
 POUR LE  
**SERVICE CIVIL  
 INTERNATIONAL**

**STATUTS**

**1. But de l'Association**

L'A. S. C. I. unit tous les amis du service civil sans distinction de nationalité, de confession ou de parti, désirant :

- étudier à fond les possibilités du service civil et en répandre l'idée dans la population ;
- appuyer les campagnes du service civil par leur collaboration personnelle ou par leur aide matérielle et morale ;
- obtenir dans les pays où le service militaire est obligatoire, la reconnaissance du service civil comme l'équivalent du service militaire pour les réfractaires pour motifs de conscience.

Sur tout autre point concernant l'armée, les membres restent libres de prendre l'attitude qui leur convient.

**2. Nature et but du Service civil**

Le service civil a pour but :

- d'apporter une aide matérielle, lors de catastrophes naturelles et pour l'exécution de tra-

The constitution of the Service Civil International demanding a 'civilian service', 1931 (SCI)



## The commitment to 'civilian service'

### A Swiss Army officer visits the volunteers in the work camp in Safien.

Although most projects focus on helping the destitute, the SCI still aspires to being a civilian service for people refusing to do military service. This objective is included in the first constitution of the organization in 1931. The Swiss authorities appreciate the work done by the volunteers and therefore support relief work by contributing working clothes and tools. But the relationship between the SCI, the government and the army remains uncomfortable, as the latter rejects civilian service. In 1932, after having criticized the government for supporting the SCI, the then head of the Federal Military Department, Federal Councillor Rudolf Minger, insists on SCI guaranteeing that the volunteers will not engage in any form of anti-military propaganda during the work camp taking place in Safien. Explaining that in SCI work camps volunteers are always entirely free to express their opinions, Ceresole firmly refuses to engage in such an undertaking, and maintains that both military and civilian service are of equal importance. He invites the Swiss Federal Council to form its own opinion. His arguments are convincing. The Army gives its approval for the loaning of necessary equipment for the carrying out of the work camp. Shortly after a Swiss Army officer visits the volunteers in Safien.

But in the following years the Swiss government demands that SCI stop accepting foreign participants; they refuse to do this, consequently government support is withdrawn.

### Hélène Monastier (1882-1976) a faithful companion

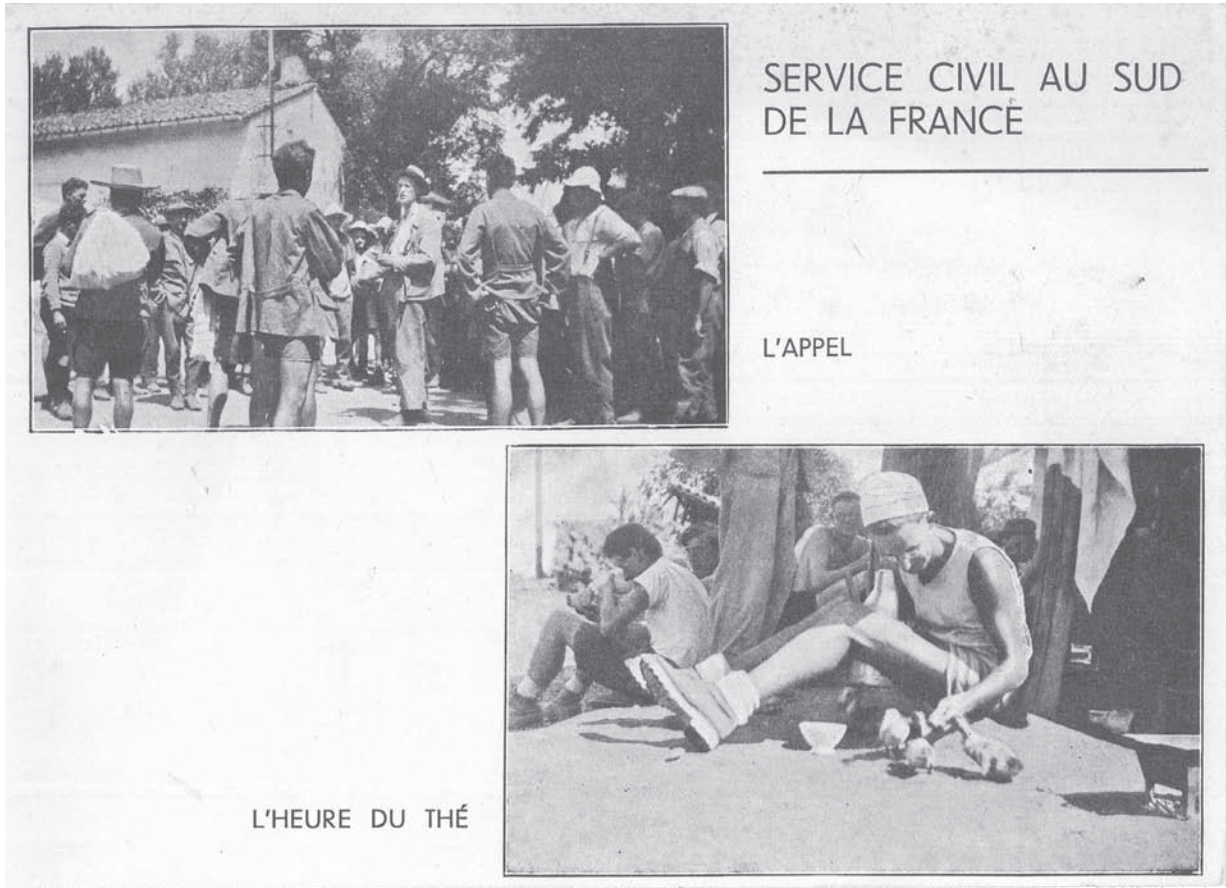
*Throughout her whole life - apart from working for 40 years in a private school in Lausanne - Hélène Monastier devoted herself to religious, social and political issues. In 1920 she participated in the founding of the Christian-Social Movement in French-speaking Switzerland. She became president of the organization in 1913. Her first meeting with Pierre Ceresole was in 1917, when he announced at a public meeting his refusal to pay military taxes. Consequently she started getting involved in his political work; the start of a life-long friendship. She also took part in SCI projects. In 1940, she became the International President of the organization. After Ceresole's death she published his biography and several of his papers.*



*Hélène Monastier, in the foreground left, cooking with other female SCI participants for the volunteers in the Safien work camp in 1932 (Graubünden, Switzerland) (SCI)*



Postcards of the international work camp in the south of France in 1930. Left: Ceresole at the roll call; right: Volunteers having a break (SCI)



International volunteers helping to remove debris from the cultivated land in Liechtenstein, 1928 (SCI)



INTERNATIONALER  
ZIVILDIENTST 1932



**SAFIEN-  
PLATZ**  
(GRAUBÜNDEN) SCHWEIZ



**BRYNMAWR  
&  
RHOS**  
(WALES)

SEKRETARIAT DES INTERNATIONALEN ZIVILDIENTSTES  
LA CHAUX-DE-FONDS (SCHWEIZ)

PREIS: Fr. 0.50

Booklet for SCI work camps in 1932 (SCI)


### Services civils internationaux 1920-1935

Lieu	Date	Durée du service	Nature du travail	Nombre total de volontaires
1. Esnes-Verdun (France)	1920-21	150 jours	Construction de baraques, route, etc., suite de guerre	10
2. Vers l'Église (Suisse)	1924	22 »	Déblaiement suite d'avalanche	28
3. Someo (Suisse) } Aurigeno » } Gresso » }	1924	118 »	Déblaiement suite d'éboulements	310
4. Almens (Suisse)	1926	54 »	Déblaiement suite d'éboulements	72
5. Feldis (Suisse)	1927	65 »	Amélioration d'alpages	81
6. Liechtenstein } Ringenberg (Suisse) } Feldis » }	1928	187 »	Déblaiement suite d'inondation, etc.	710
7. Feldis (Suisse)	1929	79 »	Amélioration d'alpages	57
8. Albefeuille-Lagarde (France)	1930	150 »	Déblaiement suite d'inondation	254
9. Hesse-Argovie (Suisse)	1931	128 »	Déblaiement suite d'orages	276
10. Brynmawr (Grande-Bretagne)	1931	85 »	Construction de jardin public, piscine, etc.	116
11. Brynmawr et Rhos (Grande-Bretagne)	1932	75 »	Construction de jardin public, piscine, etc.	20 <sup>1)</sup>
12. Safien-Platz (Suisse)	1932	97 »	Déblaiement torrent débordé	100
13. Whitby	1933	50 »	Transformation d'un ancien couvent en auberge de jeunesse	19
14. Onkengates	1933	70 »	Déblaiement	75
Blaenavon	1934	81 »		65
	1934	73 »	Aménagement d'un terrain de jeux	35
15. Mont Bally } Les Amburnex } Les Amburnex }	1934	56 »	Amélioration de pâturages	103
	1934	90 »	Réfection d'une route	127
16. Santa Maria	1934	104 »	Réfection d'un lit de torrent	127
17. Hütten	1934	56 »	Déblaiement suite d'éboulement	34
18. Bihar (Indes)	1934-35	—	Déménagement de villages suite tremblement de terre	—
<b>Total</b>				<b>2492<sup>1)</sup></b>

<sup>1)</sup> Nous n'avons compté en 1932 que les volontaires envoyés par l'intermédiaire du S. C. International.

<sup>2)</sup> Ce nombre comprend 315 sœurs chargées de la cuisine et des travaux de ménage. Les volontaires venaient en majorité de Suisse, d'Allemagne, d'Angleterre, de Scandinavie et de France, mais tous les pays d'Europe ainsi que les Etats-Unis, le Mexique, l'Inde et l'Islande, furent représentés.

List of SCI work camps between 1920 and 1935 (SCI)



EIDGENÖSSISCHES MILITÄRDEPARTEMENT  
DÉPARTEMENT MILITAIRE FÉDÉRAL  
DIPARTIMENTO MILITARE FEDERALE

Bern, den 15. September 1932.

Kontroll-Nr. 29/51.Tr/G.  
N° de contr. )  
N° de contr. )  
Caf. in der Antwort diese Nr. angeben  
Répéter le n° d'affaires dans la réponse  
Indicare questo n° nella risposta

An die Leitung des Zivildienstes,  
Safienplatz.

Im "Le Travail" vom 14. September 1932 lesen wir nachstehende Notiz:

"Au mois de juillet, le village de Safienplatz (Grisons) était dévasté par un torrent de boue. Le Service civil immédiatement s'occupa de réparer les dégâts considérables. Les C.F.F. accordent la gratuité du parcours à toute personne qui prouve qu'elle a travaillé 15 jours à Safien.

On pensait que le Département militaire de M. Minger prêterait, comme dans les années précédentes, de vieux équipements, jugés insuffisants pour les défilés militaires.

M. Minger, baron du Fromage, n'a rien prêté. Il estime que ces jeunes gens qui se dévouent pour les paysans montagnars des Grisons sont sans intérêt et qu'il est préférable pour la défense nationale de laisser moisir ces vieux équipements dans les arsenaux.

Heureusement que c'est l'année du désarmement et que la Suisse est pacifique!"

Obwohl wir uns nachgerade an Falschmeldungen durch die gegnerische Presse gewöhnt sind, möchten wir Sie im vorliegenden Falle doch bitten, dem Blatte eine Richtigstellung zukommen zu lassen. Wir wären Ihnen dankbar, wenn Sie uns von der von Ihnen getroffenen Massnahme in Kenntnis setzen würden.

Eidg. Militärdepartement:  
*Kennig*

Letter from the Head of the Military Department to the SCI accusing the organization of propagandizing in the media, 15th September 1932 (SCI)





## Election to the Grand Council of the Canton of Neuchâtel

### Some members of the parliament refuse to validate the election of Pierre Ceresole.

After having been elected to the Grand Council of the Canton of Neuchâtel, under the colours of the Socialist Party, on 21st May 1928, whilst being sworn in, Pierre Ceresole adds a personal reservation to the customary oath: « I promise to respect the constitution as long as I can to do it in all conscience, and only then. »

This stems from Article 17 of the Neuchâtel Canton Constitution, which stipulates that 'All Neuchâtel citizens, all Swiss citizens who have settled in the canton, have to do military service, as laid down in Federal and cantonal law. No one can refuse a military rank.'

Ceresole cannot abide by this article; he is torn between his pacifist convictions and his civic commitment.

His spontaneous declaration - somewhat incongruous in a swearing in to the Grand Council – provokes a degree of unrest amongst members of parliament. Some of those from the nationalist parties refuse to validate the election. Others are more sensitive to their colleague's scruples, in particular the La Chaux de Fonds lawyer, Arnold Bolle, a member of the Progressive Party<sup>1</sup> – which opposes the Socialists – nevertheless, he endeavours to find a conciliatory solution. To calm things down, Ceresole renounces his member's mandate, preferring to remain true to his ideals.

« *Tourelles 31, 23rd May. Dear sister Clara, thank you for your nice card of the 21st. It seems to me that everything has worked out exactly as we could have wished. I was very glad to observe that our socialist friends themselves, felt that it was the right thing to do, and that they too were pleased with the way things went.* » (Extract from Ceresole's letter to Clara Waldvogel, 23rd May 1928.)

Ten or more years later, and two more resounding scandals bring Pierre Ceresole back into the public eye. At the end of September 1938, the Swiss military authorities impose blackout exercises throughout the country. Ceresole repeatedly refuses to take part, and is consequently arrested and put on trial. The initial fine of 100 Swiss Francs, is subsequently commuted to a 15 – day jail sentence in Neuchâtel Prison. By refusing to take part in blackout exercises he is, in his way, resisting the fear of War, which is, he feels, invading Swiss households. He refuses to hide, to withdraw into himself, which in his opinion is what the military authorities are forcing the Swiss people to do.

« *A night of imposed blackout: shutters and windows open,*

1 The National Progressive Party, a right-wing Neuchâtel party, came about at the end of 1919; resulting from the merging of two movements: the 'Swiss Union' in Locle with 'Order and Liberty' at La Chaux de Fonds.

*by the glimmer of two candles. The police have been around and cut off the power supply. The school radio plays three bars of some concert or other, and then stops; then three more bars. Incoherence. Planes fly over in the night sky; it is their night of triumph. They are giving us an idea how they expect women and children to be massacred. » (Pierre Ceresole, *Vivre sa Vérité*. Boudry: A la Baconnière, 1949, p. 202)*

## Freedom of speech: A right in wartime too

### Minister Dubois calls the police who overpower Ceresole and arrest him.

At the beginning of 1941, Ceresole discovers a confidential circular from the Press and Radio Service of Swiss Military Headquarters. It indicates that any articles or commentaries emphasizing the horrors of war, in order to demonstrate its inhuman, anti-Christian or anti-social character are forbidden<sup>2</sup>. Shocked by the censure of the measure, he passes on the information to all the Ministers of Religion in the town of Neuchâtel, and plans making a public statement on the burning subject.

2 Pierre Ceresole, *Vivre sa Vérité*. Boudry: A la Baconnière, 1949, p. 226

## Pierre Ceresole devant le Tribunal de police de Neuchâtel

Après le défilé des témoins, c'est M<sup>e</sup> Bolle, de La Chaux-de-Fonds, qui prend la défense du prévenu. On sait de quoi il s'agit : Pierre Ceresole voulut, le jour de Vendredi-Saint, au Temple du Bas, entre la bénédiction de fin de culte et l'administration de la Sainte-Cène, lire un manifeste de sa composition. Le pasteur Dubois l'en empêcha et finalement la police dut intervenir et emmener Pierre Ceresole au poste de police, où il resta jusqu'à 22 heures.

M<sup>e</sup> Arnold Bolle, avec une verve extrême et une grande objectivité, puisqu'il est lui-même chrétien convaincu et même ancien d'église, a, par une belle plaidoirie, montré pourquoi P. Ceresole a voulu parler dans un temple.

Pierre Ceresole, pacifiste intégral, souffre d'être incompris du grand public et, obéissant à sa conscience, pense qu'il vaut mieux s'adresser directement aux chrétiens et attirer leur attention sur la nécessité qu'il y a pour eux de réfléchir et de réagir en face de la tragédie qu'est la guerre. Pierre Ceresole ne voulait pas haranguer longuement les fidèles ; il désirait lire cet ordre de l'état-major de l'armée qui lui paraît chose inouïe et indigne et voulait rappeler aux fidèles que la guerre, avec sa préparation est anti-chrétienne, anti-sociale, inhumaine. M<sup>e</sup> A. Bolle, au cours de son exposé, donne lecture d'une circulaire de l'état-major de l'armée, service de presse et radio, enjoignant aux journaux de ne pas publier d'articles et commentaires insistant sur les horreurs de la guerre.

Le tribunal, après délibération, a condamné Pierre Ceresole à 8 jours de prison civile, contre 20 que réclamait le Parquet, et aux frais qui s'élevèrent à 37 francs.

Extract of an Article from "La Sentinelle", 21 mai 1941 (BVCF)



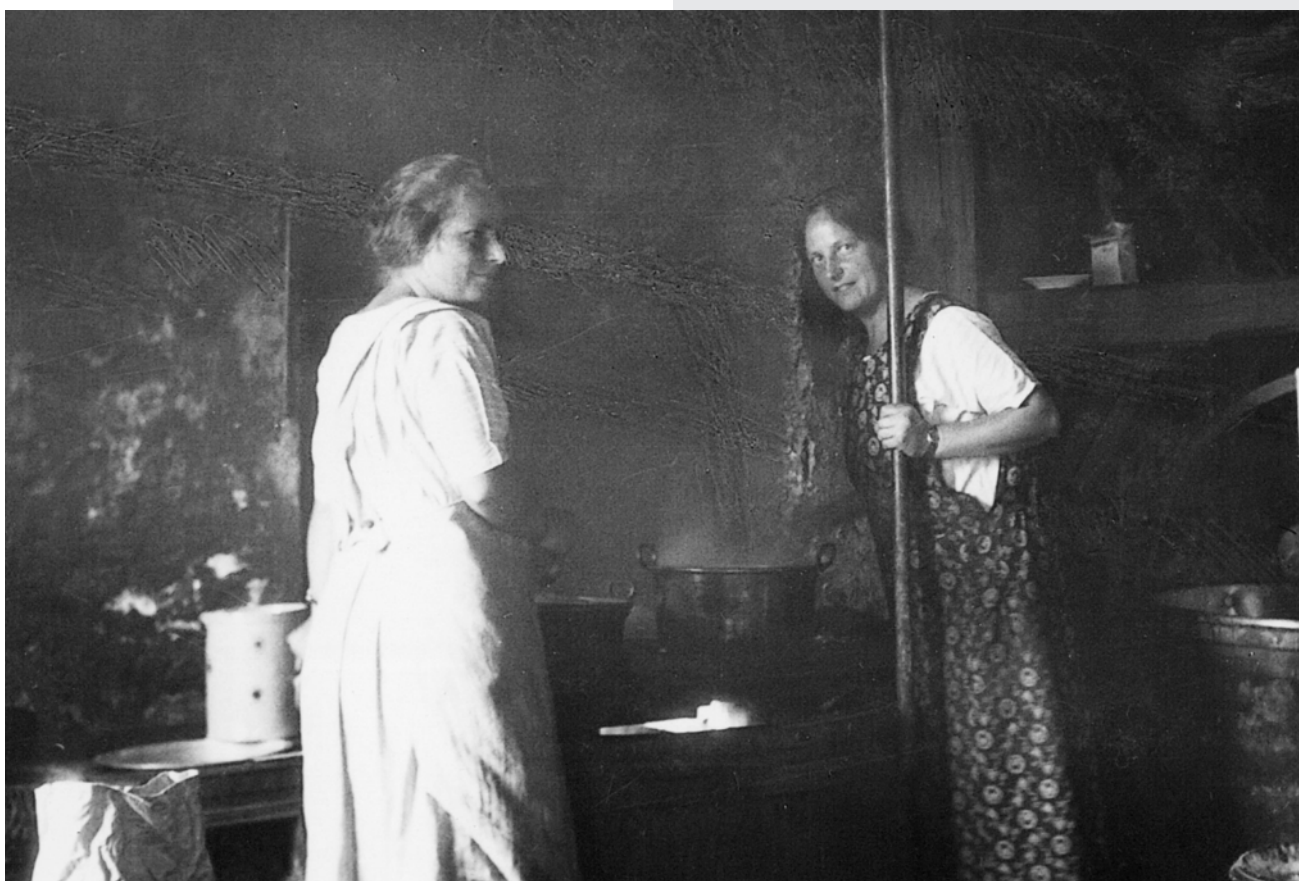
11th April 1941, Ceresole disrupts the service at the Temple du Bas (the lower church) in Neuchâtel, by haranguing the congregation with a manifesto he has written. Minister Dubois calls the police who overpower Ceresole and arrest him. He appears before the Neuchâtel court 20th May 1941, and is sentenced to be jailed for eight days, and pay costs. He is defended by the lawyer Arnold Bolle. In his preamble, Bolle shows his great admiration for the defendant:

« It is an honour to defend Mr Pierre Ceresole. In the past I naïvely considered him a political opponent! But, as I have got to know him, I not only regard him with esteem, but feel true veneration for him. I must admit that no one living on Swiss territory is more apolitical than he is. [...] Pierre Ceresole is a man who obeys his conscience whatever the consequences may be. He acts like a missionary, or an apostle. » (Arnold Bolle, *Plaidoirie devant le Tribunal de Neuchâtel concernant l'intervention de Pierre Ceresole le Vendredi-Saint 1941*. Neuchâtel, [Lausanne] : Exécutif romand du Centre suisse d'Action pour la Paix, [1941],p.3)

In the last four years of his life, Pierre Ceresole is detained six times, serving a total of 160 days behind bars. Because of his delicate health, he could obtain a stay of execution, but he prefers to accept the consequences of his choices to the very end, and pursue his ideal of peace. The scandals he provokes are, for him, so many self-liberating opportunities to be true unto his own self, and to speak out.

## Clara Waldvogel (1889-1972) a loyal friend

*A teacher of German and English in a Neuchâtel Grammar School, Clara Waldvogel devotes her whole life to the pacifist cause. From 1917 on, she becomes a faithful assistant to Pierre Ceresole, standing up for conscientious objection and the creation of a civilian service. She represents the Christian wing of the Socialist Party. A committed feminist, she is a member of the Neuchâtel branch of the Swiss Club of Women Alpinists. Within the Service Civil International she efficiently assists Ceresole in his secretarial tasks, and takes an active part in work camps. From 1938 on, Ceresole goes to live at Clara's place in order to enjoy the benefits of a more temperate climate than in La Chaux de Fonds. He describes her in words tinged with admiration and respect: « What kindness, never ruffled, never impatient. There is something so infinitely moving and superior in this perfect and satisfied humility. The very great superiority of womanhood ». (Daniel Anet, *Pierre Ceresole La passion de la paix*. Boudry: A la Baconnière, 1969, p. 290)*

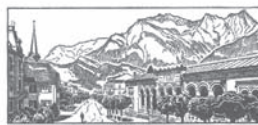


Clara Waldvogel and another volunteer in the kitchen. Work camp in Almens, 1926 (SCI)



Tourelles 31 19. IV 28

Cher-vein Clara -  
 j'ai vu de vous depuis votre  
 retour - mais je n'étais jamais au  
 si feu je suis tout étonné quand on  
 ne m'écrit pas -- J'espère bien que  
 votre s'œuvre ne s'arrête rien de  
 plus au de présent -- Tout ferait  
 aller fort bien sur votre champ de  
 bataille .. après l'excellent commen.  
 cement que vous avez fait -  
 Retour de Paris le 17 seulement,  
 - nous y avons eu d'utile, soignée pour



le service - je m'  
 suis fait à l'œuvre  
 la guerre est de  
 main main  
 Vendredi à 5 heures  
 ré - je la devais  
 de passer à Neuchâtel  
 tel en restaurant. le  
 29. 30 au 1<sup>er</sup>  
 mai -  
 37 de l'œuvre,  
 amitiés de votre  
 affection  
 Pierre Ceresole.



Mademoiselle  
 Clara Waldvogel  
 Côte 21  
 Neuchâtel.

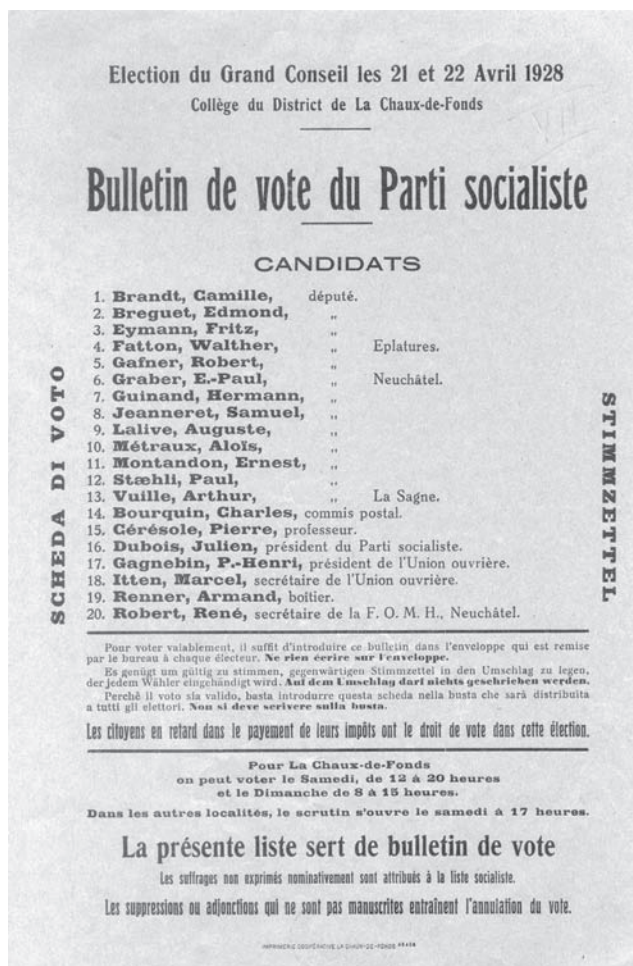
Postcard from Pierre Ceresole to Clara Waldvogel, 19th April 1928 (BVCF)



Clara Waldvogel around 1970 (Private collection)



*Pierre Ceresole on the rostrum at a Socialist Rally 'aux Gollières' (canton de Neuchâtel) in 1926 (SCI)*



*Ballot paper for the Neuchâtel Grand Council Elections, 1928 (BVCF)*





# To Germany for Peace (1933)

## August 1918

### He crosses the unguarded border of the German Empire.

Being a convinced anti-militarist, Ceresole has always felt compelled to seek out and make direct contact with his supposed enemies. Towards the end of World War I, oblivious to fears expressed by his friends, Ceresole crosses the unguarded border of the German Empire without caring about any border formalities. He is soon turned in by German soldiers and transferred back to Switzerland after a few days in prison.

## November 1933

### International volunteers should be allowed to join the German Voluntary Work Service.

The political situation in Germany has drastically changed with the coming into power of the National-Socialist Party. Rearmament is heralding the war that is looming. Ceresole, protesting against this development, repeatedly advocates dialogue with the Germans.

In November 1933, Ceresole goes the same way into Germany again. This time he succeeds in crossing the border unnoticed. He continues his trip to Stuttgart intending to try to contact the new rulers. But the Nazis in the Party headquarters in Stuttgart show only little interest in Ceresole, and don't respond to his of-

fer of entering into a dialogue with him. Somewhat by accident, Ceresole then seizes the opportunity of addressing the audience at a regimental party taking place in his hotel. Referring to international civilian service, he invites the assembly to follow up on the pledges the National-Socialist Party has made for peace since it came to power. International volunteers should be allowed to join the German Voluntary Work Service. But, he does not succeed in making any decisive contact with Hitler himself, or any other member of the leading circle.

## December 1942

### Ceresole criticises the role of Switzerland in World War II.

The outbreak of World War II deeply shocks Ceresole. Again, he travels illegally to Germany, thereby expressing his repudiation of war. "Humanity comes before polity," he tells worried friends. On the 1st of December 1942 he crosses the border at exactly the same place he had on previous occasions. Again he is caught by German soldiers and transferred to the district prison in Waldshut. There, under questioning by the Police and the Gestapo, he is particularly critical of Switzerland's role in World War II:

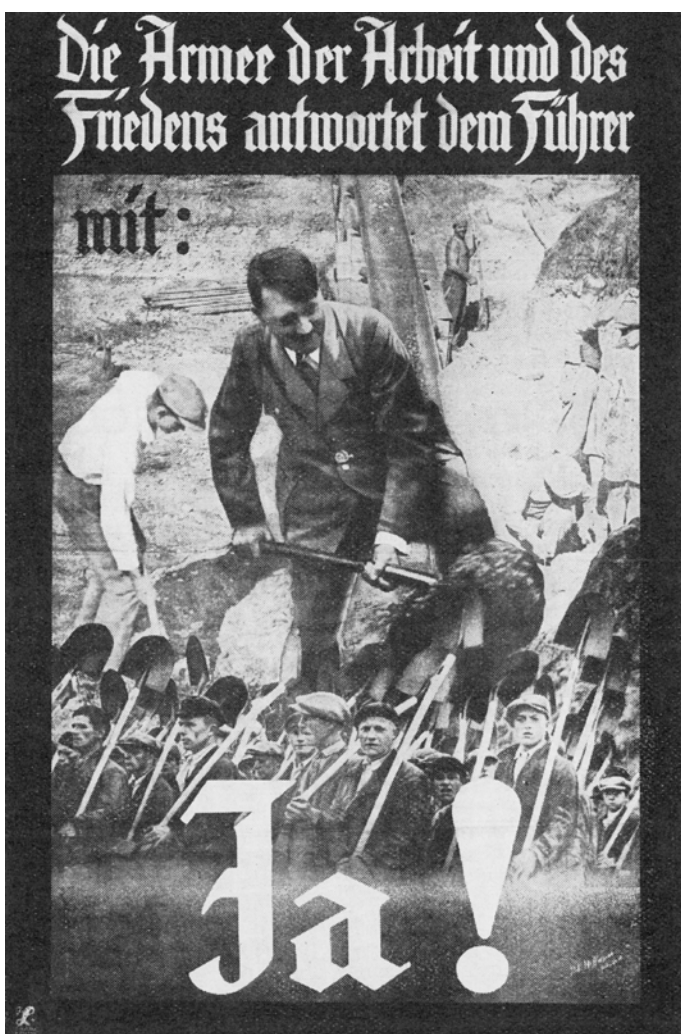
*« That a German, a convinced national-socialist, would do everything possible, to bring the present conflict to - what for him - would be an advantageous end, may seem quite "normal"; but, that in the present day a Swiss man, who by his education*



Pierre Ceresole travelling for SCI, Great Britain 1931 (SCI)

and free will is a republican and a democrat, and who supports the ideal of racial equality, should support this totalitarian war through his country's economy, its industry and finance, is altogether surprising as it is unbearable. » (Pierre Ceresole, *Les raisons de ma visite en Allemagne*. Waldshut, December 1942)

Surprisingly, Ceresole is released a few weeks later and transferred to Switzerland, where he receives a three-week prison sentence in 1943. Still unperturbed, Ceresole decides to cross the border once more in autumn 1944. He is caught again, but this time by the Swiss authorities, before actually entering Germany.



“The army of work and peace says «Yes» to their leader!” Election campaign poster for the Reichstag elections in November 1933 (SCI)

Ceresole comments on this poster at the regimental party in Stuttgart with the following words:

« I'd only like to add one thing: The young men of the Voluntary Work Service Group in this picture are all Germans. I would also like to see my Swiss, English, French and Italian nephews working for peace in such a group alongside these young Germans. » (Pierre Ceresole, *En Allemagne et aux Indes pour la paix*. La Chaux-de-Fonds, 1934, p.9)

## A tête-à-tête with Mussolini (1934)

Ceresole does not succeed in contacting Hitler, but in October 1934, he is invited to meet Benito Mussolini, the fascist leader, in the Palazzo Venezia in Rome, while on his way to India. Ceresole explains SCI work camps to the Duce and their potential for international peace, to which Mussolini replies:

Mussolini: “No!, Pacifists can talk as much as they like of the horrors of war – young men won’t allow themselves to be deterred, or even impressed, in the slightest, by all that. They too want to experience it, and they tell us: ‘You have seen it and put up with it – so, why shouldn’t we be confronted with it and have to bear it too?’ One hears that sort of thing everywhere – even from my own sons!”

Ceresole: “Wouldn’t the solution be to find a form of constructive service which affords the same dangers, and requires the same sacrifices, as war? We really feel that in order to be accepted our Civilian Service has to be able to demand more of those who commit themselves to it today, than we actually do at the moment. - We have to insist on modifying international relations so that they are based on confidence ...”

Mussolini: “Impossible!”

Ceresole: “Impossible? ...We are persuaded of the contrary, Your Excellency. To illustrate our idea we have made a firm proposition: instead of spending 100 million a year on the army, Switzerland should spend that amount on inviting the poor and sick children from the big cities in neighbouring countries to come to our Alps. In that way we would have friends everywhere.”

Unable to persuade Mussolini, Ceresole continues on his way to India, thus furthering his aim of bringing people together to work for peace.

(Pierre Ceresole, *Lettre Générale des Indes No.1, 27.Octobre 1934*)





*An old boundary stone on the Swiss – German border, where Ceresole crossed the border several times (SCI)*



*Ceresole crosses the border in 1933 from Schleitheim to Fützen, where he takes the train to Stuttgart (Reproduced with permission by swisstopo BA100327)*

# The work camps in India (1934)

## The Bihar earthquake

**Followed by floods, it devastates an area of 60,000 sq.km. in which an estimated 30,000 people were killed.**

On the 15th of January 1934 an enormous earthquake occurs near the Indian border with Pakistan, in the federal state of Bihar. Followed by floods, it devastates an area of 60,000 sq.km. in which an estimated 30,000 people were killed. Upon hearing of the disaster through Quaker friends, who have close contacts with the Indian Independence movement, Ceresole makes provisions for a first reconnaissance on-site. He has met the Mahatma Gandhi in Switzerland and they share a mutual admiration for one another, as well as the same radical-pacifist attitude. Ceresole writes to Gandhi offering assistance:

*« It isn't so much the material aid we may be able to offer you which matters most but the spirit in which we can work together. Even if the project proves to be futile, I strongly wish to bring you personally the offer of our volunteers, your friends and brothers. »* (Hélène Monastier, *Pierre Ceresole d'après sa correspondance*, Neuchâtel, 1960, p.104)

On the 25th of April, Ceresole is already in Bombay. From there he continues immediately to the devastated region, not without meeting Gandhi on his way. After discussion with local officials, the representatives of the Bihar Central Relief Committee (an organization, which is around Gandhi) and the British administration, Ceresole assesses the possibilities of a civilian service. Upon returning to Europe at the end of July Ceresole immediately launches the project.

*Letters, which Ceresole wrote home, were published by his friends in three books, 1937 (SCI)*

## Reconstruction of Villages

**Seven villages have been built, in which 600 families have found new homes.**

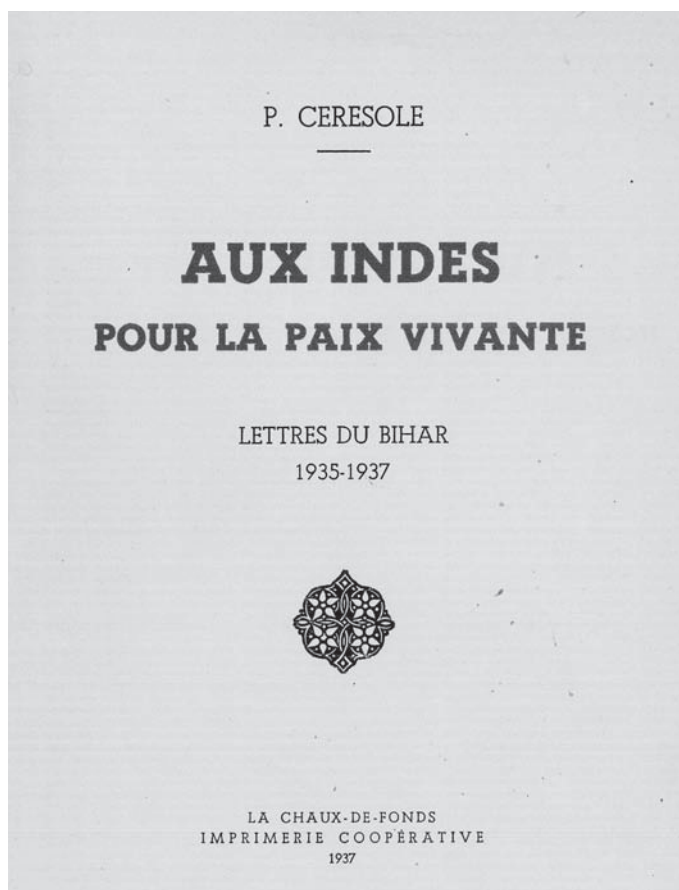
In November 1934, Ceresole returns to India, accompanied by two Englishmen and SCI-member Paul Schenker, to carry out a work camp. Together with the villagers they build dams, they construct wells and solid foundations for houses beyond the flood plain. Ceresole expresses the global vision and the peacemaking force of collective work in a letter to his sister:

*« Never before have I realized more clearly, that we really do belong to something much bigger than Switzerland. Above the "small confederation" of Switzerland – this European canton – there is a large and vital confederation of men. A spirited union, free and profound, between the Anglo-Saxon and the Indian family, would be the most powerful way to really establish this superior community in everyone's eyes. »* (Hélène Monastier, op.cit. p.108)

All in all Ceresole goes to India three times to participate in the on-going work there. He leaves for good the country for Japan and the U.S. in June 1937. During these months seven villages have been built, in which 600 families have found new homes.

The outbreak of war in Europe – first the Spanish civil war and more especially World War II – brings about quite a sudden interruption of SCI activities in India. But immediately after the end of

hostilities in 1945, SCI tries to re-establish its Indian connections. It remains an important and essential field of activity for the self-understanding of the SCI. It also emphasizes the transition from mere relief work - such as between 1934 and 1937 - to long-term development projects.





**Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)**  
**forerunner of non-violent action**



*Gandhi in Villeneuve (Switzerland) in 1931, where he met Ceresole (BVCF)*

*Born on 2nd October 1869 in Probandar, Gujarat, Gandhi (called Mahatma Gandhi) was one of the spiritual and political leaders of Indian Home Rule. He developed the concept of non-violent resistance and is still today considered one of the most famous peace activists of all time. Ceresole and Gandhi shared a deep belief in peace and highly respected one another, as we know from several letters and meetings. Gandhi was assassinated on 30th January 1948 in New Delhi.*

*Ceresole at work, 1935 (SCI)*



*Bemil Drain markieren*



*Khemi Ziegler*

*The SCI focuses on building houses, fountains and dams, 1935 (SCI)*

*The volunteers of the first work camp in India, 1935 (SCI)*



*Am 20. Januar vor dem Camp*

## The Service Civil International after 1945

**Every year, the SCI organizes over 1000 work camps for 4000 volunteers.**

Shortly after serving his last prison sentence, Ceresole suffers a stroke in February 1945. He dies on the 23d of October 1945 in La Daley near Lausanne. The Service Civil International (SCI), which he founded and moulded over many long years, shared in the reconstruction work in several countries after World War II. Already in 1947, 46 work camps are organized in nine different countries. An international association of all SCI-branches is founded shortly after with its headquarters in Paris.

In 1950 the collaboration between Europe and India is revived, thanks to lasting contacts Ceresole had made during his time in India. Several local development projects are accomplished by Indian and European volunteers, from which new national SCI-Branches ap-

pear, such as in India, Bangladesh, Japan and Sri Lanka. As one of the very few politically and religiously neutral organizations, the SCI managed to establish and maintain various contacts through the iron curtain and thus enabling frequent exchanges of volunteers from either side. The numerous voluntary work camps – their number rising to over 300 in over 24 different countries by the end of the sixties - have only been possible by working closely together with many other institutions and associated organizations, with whom the SCI has been able to establish long-term partnerships over many years. SCI's activities started to change by the beginning of the seventies. Pure relief projects - for instance after a natural disaster - or development aid have lost much of their former importance. Today it is the volunteer himself, who starts dealing with socio-political issues such as environmental protection, migration or human rights by participating in SCI work camps. Every year, the SCI organizes over 1000 work camps for 4000 volunteers; still campaigning for peace just as Ceresole had imagined.

### Valli Seshan (India)

Valli Seshan's first work camp was in India in 1957, followed by LTV service in Europe in 1958-1959 and work in the Asian Secretariat, 1960 to 1965. She and her husband, A.S. Seshan, were part of a 4-person International Secretariat, based in Bangalore, from 1986 till 1990. They always maintained an "open house" for SCI volunteers. Seshan died at the time of the annual SCI meeting in Bangalore in 1989. Their daughter lives in Kerala and Valli has settled in Bangalore.

*« India was a British colony in the '30s when Pierre Ceresole came with a spirit of service and of integration into the local environment. It was striking that, although he was the boss, the person who brought the resources, he himself worked like anyone else. This idea of service and of breaking down prejudices between people has always impressed me. »*

*Volunteers preparing a meal: Chamba (India), 1951 (SCI) and Castagneto (Italy), 2009 (SCI)*





# The volunteers

(Origine of the quotes: Olivier Bertrand, *Breaking down barriers*, 2009)

## David Palmer (Great Britain)

David Palmer was born in rural North West England, and started out in life as a railway worker. For a period of about ten years (the sixties) he worked in long-term and short-term work camps, mainly with SCI in various countries, including Germany, Algeria, Iran and Norway. His subsequent professional life has been shared between teaching and social work, in Britain and in France.

« For the first time in my life I found myself in a real international group of about 10 different nationalities. The work was hard but I enjoyed it. The camp's purpose was simple and easy to grasp, and our life there was well organized, and we pulled together. Our specific tasks, whether on the site or chores in the camp (cleaning and cooking), were decided upon collectively by discussion at meal times, and in 'Camp meetings' once or twice a week in the evening. To my pleasure we often sang songs particularly at special 'goodbye' gatherings. On such occasions, after a few words from the leader, we sang 'L'amitié' - a song on the theme of friendship. I found these moments moving. »



The volunteers singing the SCI song 'l'Amitié' (Friendship) in St. Stephan (Switzerland), 1948 (SCI)



Phyllis Sato with SCI friends in Calcutta (India), 1958 (Private Collection)

## Phyllis Sato (USA)

Phyllis (Clift) Sato, was part of a 3-person team of LTVs (long-term volunteers) who served in India and Pakistan in 1957-1958; married fellow LTV, Hiroatsu Sato, shared in SCI office duties in Tokyo, Malaysia and Singapore from 1960 to 1968, was part of Visionville in south India between 1969 and 1977 and helped in reviving SCI-USA during the 1980s. Her post SCI years have been spent in Virginia.

« The special and lasting friendships spawned often in first work camps remain for me 'la crème' of the SCI experience, and remain long after the project has disintegrated. I am not sure that Pierre Ceresole intended this, but this has had the biggest impact on me. »

## Mohamed Sahnoun (Algeria)

Originally from Orléansville (nowadays known as El Asnam) he got to know SCI in his home country, Algeria, in 1952-1953, and took part in several work camps before being put in charge of the Algerian branch for a while. After Algerian Independence, he held high office in the Diplomatic Corps and in international organizations, whilst constantly endeavouring to achieve Peace and Reconciliation.

« At the time we were emerging from adolescence, our SCI experience was a sort of answer, a school, - a fabulous school. The discussions taught me a lot. It was also the first 'international school' we got to know, though we were still only students. In work camps, we really encountered the world, and we could only be influenced by it. It more or less determined what I went on to do in my life afterwards. It taught us how to avoid conflicts, to overcome them, and learn how to live with one another. »



Mohamed Sahnoun today  
(Private Collection)



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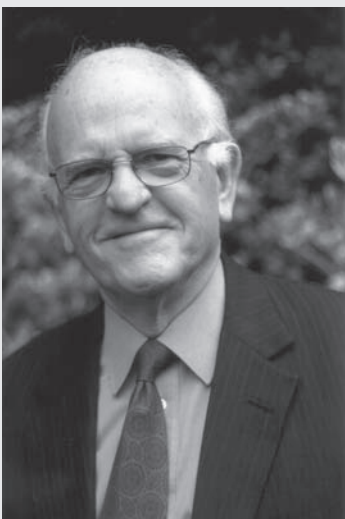
## Max Hildesheim (Belgium)

Born in Brussels of Dutch parents, Max Hildesheim was in Indonesia during the war. While still a student of architecture, he worked for SCI from 1960 in Morocco and Moldavia and was a long-term volunteer in Togo.

*« Of course, at the end of my stay in Togo, it was a bit difficult for me to leave all those new friends. They had really adopted me. Whenever a foreigner asked the villagers where I was from, they would say “He is from the village”. Furthermore, they often called me by a nickname in their language. (In fact, as was customary, they used to give volunteers a sort of second ‘first name’ as they did amongst themselves). It was Koffi, which means Friday. »*



Max Hildesheim in Togo en 1961 (Private Collection)



## Frank Judd (Great Britain)

Frank Judd graduated from the London School of Economics and was president of the UN Student Association in the '50s, then he was an officer in the Royal Air Force 1957-59. From 1960 to 1966, he was Secretary General of International Voluntary Service, the British Branch of SCI. Labour Member of Parliament from 1966, Minister from 1976 to 1979, he has been a member of the House of Lords since 1991.

*« Anyway, the spirit of Pierre and Ernst Ceresole prevailed! Pacifists and non-pacifists could be peace workers together. Friendships forged in IVS/SCI with pacifists have been amongst the most enduring and important I have had ... I know SCI played a huge part in shaping me. »*

Frank Judd today (Private Collection)



# SCI branches worldwide

CONTINENT	COUNTRY	FIRST Work camp
<b>Africa</b>	Algeria	1948
	Mauritius	1960
	Nigeria	1962
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Moldova		1962
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- Website of SCI International Archives:  
<http://www.service-civil-international.org/ceresole-pierre.html>
- Website of Site of Alfred Manuel, grand-nephew of Pierre Ceresole:  
<http://perso.unige.ch/~manuel/ceresen.htm>

### Service Civil International

- International Website of SCI:  
[www.sciint.org](http://www.sciint.org)
- Website of SCI Switzerland:  
[www.scich.org](http://www.scich.org)
- SCI in Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia:  
[http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Service\\_civil\\_international](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Service_civil_international) (French)  
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- [www.chaux-de-fonds.ch/bibliotheques](http://www.chaux-de-fonds.ch/bibliotheques)

*Ceresole in Bihar (India), 1935 (SCI)*



# Exposition

# Pierre Ceresole

(1879-1945)

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Avec le soutien de la  
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