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Excerpts from

***Quaker international work in Europe since 1914***

by Willis Hall, published as his doctoral thesis at the *Institut Universitaire de Hautes Etudes Internationales de Genève* in 1938

Selection regarding the Quaker Group and the Quaker International Center in Geneva

**THE QUAKER INTERNATIONAL CENTERS AND RELIGION**

[p. 93] In addition to Germany and France Yearly Meetings, which are now autonomous bodies, there are two more groups, one in Geneva which has not been organized as a Monthly Meeting but which functions in most respects as a Monthly Meeting belonging to London Yearly Meeting, and a small group which meets in the Vienna Center but which has not been organized as a Monthly Meeting. The Geneva Meeting in contrast to all the others had no direct connection with the reconstruction or relief work [*Ed: after the 1914-18 war*]. In June, 1920, a small group of individuals began holding meetings for worship in private homes and later in a room loaned for the purpose by the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Institute. This group continued to become more and more active until 1923 when it seems to have been one of the principal forces, together with the Quakers' interest in the League of Nations, which induced the C.I.S. at the Council Meeting on May 2, 1923, to take the preliminary steps towards assisting this local group of Friends to lease a room at 5, Place de la Taconnerie with the expectation that it would be used for the Meeting and for a Quaker Center. The A.F.S.C., following the lead taken by the English Friends, on June 25, 1923, voted the necessary appropriations to enable it to share equally in the Geneva Center work. Some months later additional rooms were taken which served as the headquarters of the Geneva Center until September 1937.

Only a few citizens of Geneva have ever joined the Society of Friends, yet that Meeting is one of the largest and most active to be found in any of the Centers. The League of Nations draws Friends and others in sympathy with Quakerism from many countries to Geneva, and consequently this Meeting has today the most international group and at the same time one that is kept keyed up and alert by the new life and the new challenges which are always coming to it. But in view of the knowledge that it is located in the city of Calvin, that a number of modern religious movements have caught the attention of many of the younger intellectuals, and also that the Meeting is largely composed of foreign

intellectuals who are also predominantly [p. 94] English-speaking, would lead to the conclusion that there is little likelihood that either the masses or the intellectuals will form a strong indigenous Society of Friends. [...]

[p. 95] The very existence of the Centers [*Ed: throughout Europe*] tends to draw a large number of the most prominent Quakers to visit them and give addresses and other assistance to an extent not found in the history of any foreign group of Friends in an equally short period before the World War.

Many articles and letters, written by Friends, set forth the proposition that the growth of the meetings for worship, in and associated with the European Centers, has been encouraged not because of a real desire for great masses of new members as was earlier noted, but more specifically because they tend to draw into fellowship with Friends many sympathetic individuals who may become interpreters of their peace and religious ideas. [...] Each small meeting for worship also serves as a more or less stable nucleus around which to build what is popularly known in post-war Quaker parlance as “the Wider Fellowship” – that is a closer linking up of sympathetic non-Friends for more frequent and wider co-operation and from which Friendly ideals will be radiated to their fellow-countrymen. [p. 96] This new relationship with non-Friends is one of the most striking results of the War and post-War work at home and abroad. It has led Friends to a remarkable extent to cease speaking, thinking and acting in terms of a more or less self-sufficient membership and has led them towards a wider and more complete co-operation with those who think much as they do on many of the things which they feel fundamental to their religious and social life. They have widely adopted the term “friends of the Friends” which came into popular use in a number of German and other European groups after the War. [...] The known interests of the “friends of the Friends” enables the Centers through them to increase the range of their contacts and at the same time to get their philosophy of life and their peace views before a vastly greater number of people than would appear to be possible otherwise.

## **A SERVICE OF STUDY AND INTERPRETATION**

[p. 102] International luncheons were organized for several years by the Geneva and Paris Centers which brought together leaders from many of the organizations located in those cities for a better understanding of many problems of international importance. Also, at frequent intervals in the past, the Geneva Center and Hostel accommodations have been placed at the disposal of special groups who seemed most likely to profit from the advantages offered there for a quick understanding of some phases of national or international problems. Such aggregations [...] have been assisted by one or more of the Centers through the

use of rooms, by conducted tours, information service, introductions to specialists in many fields, by providing lecturers on problems of special interest to them, or even by arranging social occasions for some of them, especially in Geneva where, for several years, a number of such groups were invited to the attractive garden of the Quaker Student Hostel for tea or to enjoy a bonfire where they might meet in a more informal way other people from other lands. Last, and of considerable importance to individual Friends from many countries, are the opportunities provided by the Center and Hostel in Geneva for them to enjoy all the advantages provided for others, and also the added advantage of being able because of the centralizing effect of the Center and Hostel to gather in groups formally or informally nearly every year, during the meetings of the Assembly [*Ed: of the League of Nations*], for a mutual exchange of information of value in their work for better international relations and for a closer acquaintance with their fellow-members from other countries. [...]

[p. 104] The Geneva Center lacked the original impetus which the relief work provided for all the others, but, largely owing to the energy and resourcefulness of its Secretaries and a small group of Friends and attenders in the Geneva meeting who have been or who are officially connected with the League of Nations, the International Labor Office and a number of other local and international organizations in that city, that handicap has been largely overcome.

### **FACILITATE THE DISSEMINATION OF ACCURATE INFORMATION**

[p. 106] One of the most useful agencies in this interpretive service is the publishing of periodicals. The Paris Center and French Friends have published since January, 1922, a small magazine called *L'Echo des Amis*. Articles and news are sometimes contributed to it by the Geneva Center, and by Swiss Friends. It has a limited circulation in French-speaking Switzerland in addition to its wider circulation in France and Belgium. The Berlin Center and German Friends likewise publish a similar magazine in German – *Der Quäker*. They too, receive contributed articles from Friends in other countries using the same language, the Vienna Center and Austrian Friends, and German-Swiss. [...]

In contrast to *L'Echo des Amis* and *Der Quäker* which have been published primarily for European circulation, Bertram Pickard, Secretary of the Geneva Center, edited from 1924 to 1929 a small monthly magazine bearing the title *The World Outlook* which circulated more widely in Anglo-Saxon countries. Two of the Secretaries, Richard L Cary (Berlin) and Bertram Pickard (Geneva) had had experience as writers [...] Bertram Pickard has for a number of years supplied news from Geneva to *Peace* (the organ of the National Peace Council), the *Washington Post*, the Westminster Press, Ltd., the World Outlook Press Service,

the No-Frontier Press Service and to Lucy Meacham Thruston's press-work in America.

## HOSTELS

[p. 126] The Geneva Center, in contrast to the others, organized in 1927 a Student Hostel which was intended to draw together some of the more advanced research students, especially but not exclusively from the Society of Friends, who come to Geneva to study international relations in connection with the University of Geneva and the Graduate Institute of International Studies. The new Hostel was expected to add considerably to the facilities offered in Geneva at that time for the care of foreign students' social life and their association with those of similar interests, and at the same time provide comfortable living quarters for them.

Friends believed that it might be possible to bring together regularly a small group of students from several nations who, [p. 127] by living together as a group for a semester or a year, would return home taking with them broader appreciations not only for their comrades in the hostel but also from the countries and cultures which they represent. Here, as in all Centers, one of the predominant aims is to "increase international friendship by individual understanding". Born out of religious convictions of the possibility of integrating the Quaker values in an international group of whatever religion or nationality, there has been a consistent Quaker attitude and atmosphere present throughout the development of the Hostel. The degree of external emphasis on positive religious practices has depended on the group of students at any particular time. This freedom and this attitude, together, have enabled the Christian and the non-Christian to feel quite comfortable while at the same time it has led to a very real fellowship and co-operation in much of their life at the Hostel.

The work has gone through several stages of experimental evolution in the accomplishment of these ends. Inadequate and cramped quarters in the Chemin Krieg gave place, 1933, to a larger building with a charming garden in the Chemin Bertrand, which in turn was replaced in 1937 by the most comfortable, most attractive, and the best equipped hostel which they have yet enjoyed, located, together with the Center, on the fourth floor of the former Palais des Nations. [Ed: *Palais Wilson*]. From a small group in the early years it had in 1938 the largest body of resident students in its history. [...]

[p. 128] Whenever there has been a reasonable unity of interest in the group it has been possible for the Hostel to arrange many "extra-curricular" activities. Distinguished visitors could be invited to dinner in the expectation that

most of the students would remain afterwards to take part in an hour's discussion led by the visitor [...]

The Hostel had accommodated two hundred and thirty students from thirty-five countries in the period from September 1927 to January 18, 1938. The summer months in turn often bring many students from Professor Zimmerman's School of International Studies [...] and the sessions of the League of Nations in September of every year generally fill it again with temporary visitors for a number of days before the reopening of the academic year. Even throughout the year there are many visitors who have in some way heard of Friends and who are ready to occupy available rooms for short periods. While the Geneva Hostel has been by far the most successful of all the hostels, the hostel idea in general has been quite popular with the Service Committees for [p. 129] several reasons: they largely pay their own way; they draw many people to the Centers who come in contact with the work over a longer period of time; as in Vienna, a part of the rooms have been used for visitors in the summer and for student clubs in the winter; they give comfortable living quarters to some of the Secretaries at a minimum of expense; they supplement the work and the influence of the Centers; and finally, the library, rooms, general equipment and even the personnel of the Centers and hostels are so directed that small outlays of money may go far in actual accomplishment.

### **CENTERS CO-OPERATE ACROSS FRONTIERS**

[p. 138] The Geneva Center, located in a neutral country, has been widely regarded among Friends as being more impersonal than the others in its co-operation, largely because Switzerland has few of the national rivalries embittering the relations of the other countries in which Centers are located, and, also, because most of the members of the Geneva group of Friends are foreigners. Partly because of this location of the Center, and the international composition of the Members' Meeting, a number of problems which have been of direct importance to the other Centers have been taken up with vigor and determination by the Geneva Center. It has been especially helpful in assisting them to get problems of international importance before individual statesmen, national delegations, or individual members of Committees or Commissions of the League of Nations. One example will perhaps suffice to illustrate this co-operation with another Center.

Just at the close of the World War the Vienna Center, partly because of its relief work and because of its interest in suffering and injustice wherever found, came squarely up against the problem of "stateless" people – a situation created in Austria in connection with the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian

Empire. [...] The American Secretary of the Vienna Center read a paper before a Conference on the “stateless” held in Geneva in the autumn of 1930. In it she dealt particularly with the humanitarian side of this tragic question. Before she left she was able to place the problem before the British delegation to the Assembly of the League of Nations and asked them to work [p. 139] towards an early presentation of the question for the consideration of the Assembly.

Three years later the whole problem of “stateless” people was brought to public attention through the suffering of German exiles after the National Socialist Revolution in the spring of 1933. [...]

The Geneva Center [...] issued on May 6, 1933 an “Appeal” to Members of the Council of the League of Nations [*Ed: which in essence proposed the extending the so-called Nansen passport, originally given to Russian and Armenian refugees, to all stateless persons*]. [...]

[p. 140] The appeal was given a wide circulation. It appeared in such papers as *The New York Times* and the *Journal de Genève* [...]

A contemporary report from the Geneva Centre states:

“Special efforts were made with the help of Friends in England to persuade the British Government to take the necessary initiative but [...] the Foreign Office could not be moved in time to secure action at the May Meeting of the League Council. However, the ground has been prepared for subsequent action, and valuable contact established with a number of bodies which [...] have interested themselves in the problem of statelessness. These include The Save the Children International Union, The International Red Cross Committee, The International Federation of League of Nations Societies, [...] The Friends’ International Service and the Women’s League for Peace and Freedom. [...]”

[p. 141] The Geneva Members Meeting, in the summer of the same year, urged the Far East Crisis Watching Committee of London Yearly Meeting to send one of its members to Geneva at the time of the consideration of the Lytton Report. A member of that Committee was sent. [...]

Geneva Friends had as early as August 1932 issued a statement which clearly indicated the gravity of the situation of the situation in the Far East. This was followed on December 2 [...] [p. 142] by an Appeal [...] placed in the hands of the delegates from Japan, China, England and America.

[p.143] Just two months later, February 7, 1933, a third appeal, this time on “The Far East Crisis and the League”, was drawn up by an international group of Friends in Geneva especially for the attention of the Committee of Nineteen. This too was widely circulated among groups interested in peace. In the meantime the Geneva Center, only three weeks after the Dec 2 Appeal, participated in another type of co-operation concerning the same problem [...]

which is clearly illustrated in the following brief letter dated January 20, 1933, from Bertram Pickard [p.144] to the leader of the Japanese delegation in the Special Assembly:

“At the request of the American Friends Service Committee, Philadelphia, I am sending you herewith for your information a copy of a ‘Message of Conciliation to Japan and China’ that has been carefully prepared by a group of representative Friends in America” [...]

### **ATTEMPTS TO STRENGTHEN MANY PEACE FORCES**

[p. 182] [...] one of the highest points in the Quaker co-operation with some of the largest international organizations interested in furthering the cause of peace came in 1932 while the Disarmament Conference was meeting in Geneva. The World Alliance of the Y.M.C.A.s, the World’s Y.W.C.A., The World’s Student Christian Federation, Universal Christian Council for Life and Work, World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches, The International Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the Friends’ International Service were made members of a joint Disarmament Committee with Bertram Pickard, the Secretary of the Quaker Center as Chairman of the new organization.

The Friends’ Center, because of the position of its leader, was consequently at the heart of the united action and publicity work as it was carried on by these various societies in their joint capacity. [...]

[p. 183] This organization, in turn, was represented by Mr. Bertram Pickard in the International Consultative Group – a group made up of many disarmament Committees in Geneva. As popular interest in disarmament receded, practical alterations took place in the program of the Group and [he] became convener of the International Consultative Group - a position he still holds [*in 1938*].

[...] The Geneva Center, located near large numbers of such organizations, is known more particularly for work of this nature. In 1925, the Center called together some twenty international associations for the expressed purpose of finding ways in which they might co-operate. This was the first step in the evolution of “The Federation of Private and Semi-Official International Organizations [p. 184] Established at Geneva”. [...]

Thirty-nine organizations held their inaugural meeting as a Federation in June 1929 [...] “The Meeting appointed Mr. Bertram Pickard, of the Friends’ Center, [...] to be Honorary Secretary of the Federation.” He was asked “to assume the functions of Treasurer as well as Secretary”. The Friends’ Center became the office of the Federation. Mr. Pickard and the Center have continued that relationship with the Federation until the present time [*Ed: 1938*].



Largely because of the existence of this central body and the Quaker connection with it [...] a great deal has been done by the Geneva Center in an attempt to increase friendliness and co-operation between the foreign groups and the people of Geneva, as well as attempting to realize the more immediate aim of increasing the effectiveness of the organizations through a lessening of wasteful [p. 185] overlapping in their services, the establishment of a central information bureau, and the publication of information concerning the work of the international organizations for their own use and for the use of visitors to Geneva. In fact it was also largely due to the planning and the persistence of the Secretary of the Center that some 30 of these International bodies were brought together in one building – the Palais Wilson – after it was vacated by the League of Nations upon the completion of the new Palais des Nations.

[p. 186] The Quaker organizations in Europe have been so arranged that they lend themselves easily to some degree of co-operation under just such restrictions as have been mentioned [*Ed: e.g. the discouragement of peace organizations working against obligatory military conscription in France and Germany at this time*]. It was clearly observed as early as 1925 that under certain conditions, at least, there must be a “differentiation of function and responsibility as between Group and Center.” And in all the succeeding years this differentiation has played a very definite part in shaping the policies and actions of the Quaker international work. The Centers as Centers may under certain circumstances do a certain type of work. The local Friends group may carry on another type of activity where national prejudice is too strong against foreign organizations, or under other circumstances both may unite to further the work, and even under still other difficult conditions where the Quakers as such cannot work effectively, friends of the Friends or other organizations sympathetic to their work have definitely been encouraged to pursue certain lines of action intended to strengthen goodwill and co-operation among peoples.

[p. 187] The recent reports of the Centers make clear that they continue their work for peace separately and in cooperation with other peace societies in many directions and in un-numbered ways, in spite of the fact that this phase of the work in Europe has been of necessity of a far more opportunist nature than Friends have generally been accustomed to in democratic countries, where they [...] are not obliged to consider the sufferings which their actions may bring to their fellow members of other nationalities.

[p. 195] The Geneva Center has suffered less and has been threatened less than any of the others by recent political and economic changes. There have been times [...] when there was serious thought on the part of many Friends that

they [p. 196] would have to be closed because of the financial depression or the introduction of political policies which were feared might too severely restrict their work. But there seems to have been no hint since 1926 that such a step need be taken regarding the Geneva Center. Operating under especially favorable conditions, and comparatively free from time-consuming relief work, it has been enabled to carry on its functions much as the early visions for the Quaker International Center work had intended. It has been for many years spoken of in very appreciative terms and in a number of instances in the past it has been referred to as being the most international of all the Centers, an appreciation among Friends which was further evidenced when a radiogram from the A.F.S.C. reached Geneva on December 10, 1936, preceded by a letter from the F.S.C. authorizing those in charge to move the Center from 5 Place de la Taconnerie to far superior quarters on the fourth floor of the Palais Wilson.

This move is looked upon as one of the most progressive and perhaps the most significant changes in the recent history of the Center. Coming as it does in a time of great uncertainty in Europe, it not only demonstrates the interest and appreciation that the Committee have for the Center, but at the same time, through the comfortable and commodious quarters shared between the Center and the Quaker Student Hostel, both organizations are believed to be in a better position to fulfil the functions envisaged for them by the leaders more than a decade ago.

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Footnotes have not been retained.