

Cooperation and Pacifism in a Colonial Context: Service Civil International and Work Camps in Bihar, 1934–1937¹

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Abstract

After a major earthquake in Bihar and Nepal in 1934, the Swiss peace and relief organisation Service Civil International (SCI), would for the first time set up work camps in India. This chapter examines how the work camps in Bihar materialized through an exchange of ideas, networks, and cooperation in Europe and India. While several factors conspired to elicit the idea of reconstruction camps in Bihar at that particular time, SCI would for the practical implementation of the project depend on the support of a network of people that included Indian politicians, British Quakers and members of the Indian Conciliation Group. The thoughts and agency of SCI's founder, Pierre Ceresole serve not only as a window into the life of an internationalist and pacifist of the time, but also illustrate the importance of political networks and ideological motivation in the internationalisation of disaster relief in the 1930s. In this context, the chapter discusses the organisation and motivation behind setting up work camps in India.

International Cooperation and Peace Building: From Europe to India

The period from the early 1800s to the Second World War has been dubbed the 'Age of Imperial Humanitarianism', characterized by ideologies of humanity and a belief that Christianity and the West defined the value of the internatio-

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nal community (Barnett 2011: 30). International cooperation in both disaster relief and humanitarian aid increased significantly in the inter-war period following the First World War but despite the founding of the League of Nations and vibrant internationalism in the inter-war period, a lasting peace failed. Not until in the Second World War II, the establishment of international cooperation in war reconstruction by United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) in 1943 marked what is commonly viewed as a first success in establishing an international relief community (Reinisch 2011: 260–262). Amidst a growing consciousness of international cooperation as a tool for peace, Pierre Ceresole (1879–1945) founded the Swiss-based international voluntary peace organisation Service Civil International (SCI) in 1920 (Rodriguez 2000: 1, 3). With the organisation Ceresole aimed to effectively put an end to war by setting up internationally composed work camps with foreign volunteers and local labour in disaster reconstruction, as a remedy for the conflicts he perceived to have been created by nationalism.

In this contribution I examine how SCI's work programme and strategies expanded beyond Europe to India in 1934 after Ceresole received the news of a large earthquake in Bihar and Nepal.² In all, Ceresole came to visit Bihar four times during the period 1934 to 1937, but the organisation would in the end send only a handful of volunteers from Europe. SCI's reconstruction camps in Bihar should not be noted foremost for the scope of the work, which was modest, but as a beginning of SCI's lasting presence in carrying out work camps in the region after independence, ranging from refugee aid in the wake of partition 1947 and 1971, cyclone rehabilitation in Bangladesh, a leprosy colony in Orissa and agricultural rehabilitation in Sri Lanka, to setting up long-term projects for "community development" (for examples see Müller 1993: 53, and Sato 2002: 1). The main part of the work between 1934 and 1937 involved the relocation of villages threatened by floods as a direct result of the changed land levels and riverbeds after the earthquake. The cooperation between the government, the Bihar Central Relief Committee (BCRC) and the SCI resulted in the Joint Flood Committee which carried out the resettlement of about one thousand families on three new village sites in November 1934.³ Of specific

² The earthquake started between 2:13 pm and 2:14 pm Indian Standard Time, 15 January 1934, and continued to be felt for a period of five minutes in the central tract (Dunn et al 1939: 1–2).

³ The scheme was worked out by three representatives from the government, the SCI and the Bihar Central Relief Committee (BCRC) respectively: Memorandum of Discussion held on 7th December 1934, Memo No. R 5554-55, J. E. Scott, Commissioner, Tirhut Division, 8 December 1934, Muzaffarpur. Lausanne University Library (LUL), Pierre Ceresole (PC) 999. Archival material from the private papers of Pierre Ceresole in Lau-

interest in this chapter, is the way Ceresole's plan for work camps in Bihar materialized through an exchange of ideas, networks, and cooperation in Europe and India. While several factors conspired to elicit the idea of reconstruction camps in Bihar at that particular time, Ceresole would for the practical implementation of the project depend on the support of a network of people that included Indian politicians, British Quakers and members of the Indian Conciliation Group. In this context M. K. Gandhi's views on non-violence and non-cooperation would feature as an important inspiration to Ceresole, at the same time as his political contacts were important for getting the approval of setting up work camps in Bihar. The thoughts and agency of SCI's founder, Ceresole serve not only as a window into the life of an internationalist and pacifist of the time, but also illustrate the importance of political networks and ideological motivation in the internationalisation of disaster relief in the 1930s. In this context, the article discusses the organisation and motivation behind setting up work camps in India.

Ceresole's vision of the work camps in India as well as his experiences from India (1934–1937) are partly documented in his private and SCI correspondence, diaries and publications from the period. Some of Ceresole's first-hand accounts were, after being translated, edited and abridged, published in a range of newspapers in India, in England, on continental Europe, and in the SCI publication *Bulletin de 'Association du SCI* (published in French and in German). In addition to the International Archives of the Service Civil International and the private papers of Pierre Ceresole at Lausanne University Library, the most comprehensive description of Ceresole's experience in Bihar can be found in the edited letters of Ceresole, of which parts have also been translated into English.⁴ It is noteworthy that his biographers (Bietenholz-Gerhard 1962; Mo-

sanne University Library are referred to as 'PC'. The work was based from Sonathi and encompassed the transfer and rebuilding of villages from the areas Sonathi and Minapur in the district of Muzaffarpur. The committee's task of shifting villages threatened by flood was financed by the government with 50,000 rupees from the Viceroy's Earthquake Relief Fund; 43,500 rupees were granted by the BCRC, and the SCI contributed with European volunteers and the salaries for local workers. BCRC: Proceedings of the Managing Committee (11 January 1935, Sadaqat Ashram, Patna), 2 pages, PC 1006: 1.

⁴ Some of Ceresole's published letters, pamphlets and reports are issued by the Service Civil International. He also wrote a number of brief accounts published in newspapers. The publication *En Allemagne et aux Indes pour la paix* (English translation by Palmer s.d., In Germany and India for Peace) was printed before the first collection of Ceresole's edited letters from his three longer journeys to India 1934 to 1937 were published (Andrews & Ceresole 1935, *En Inde Sinistrée*; Ceresole 1936: *En vue de l'Himalay: Lettres du Bihar*; Ceresole 1937, *Aux Indes pour la paix vivante: Lettres du Bihar 1935–1937*). Ceresole's widow, Lise Ceresole, with the help of friends published an edited volume of extracts from his notebooks in 1960 (Hélène Monastier, Lise Ceresole, Edmond Privat,

nastier 1946, 1960; Monastier *et al* 1960) and editor of his published notebooks (Harvey & Yates 1954) are mainly 'Friends', i.e. members of the Fellowship of Friends, or Quakers as they are commonly referred to, a community that Ceresole joined not until in 1936,⁵ only nine years before his demise and after spending the preceding two years organising work camps in Bihar.⁶ Like the SCI publications of the organisation's history, his biographers inevitably emphasise Ceresole's Christian spiritual inspiration while his interaction with Romain Rolland (1866–1944), and Edmond Privat (1889–1962), who were also his friends, as well as his support of pacifism and the political use of non-violence, independent of religion remain of secondary importance in these accounts. Although the inspirational source for pacifism was 'almost exclusively Christianity' in Britain in the inter-war period, socialism played an important role from the late nineteenth century (Ceadel 1980: 13). Gandhi's influence on Ceresole may also have been underplayed due to the fact that mainly members of the Society of Friends have authored Ceresole's biographical accounts. To Ceresole, the practice of non-violence was an expression of true Christianity; silent worship and prayer, on the other hand, were secondary to practical work as a means "to see and to serve God with heart, eyes and hands

Samuel Gagnebin (eds.), Pierre Ceresole: d'après sa correspondance). According to Harvey and Yates (1954), Lise Ceresole had published the same of material under the title *Vivre sa Vérité*, but this is probably a confusion regarding the source: *Vivre sa Vérité: Carnets de route* was the name of a journal which Pierre Ceresole published from 1909 to 1944. Extracts from these publications as well as from his three volumes of letters from India mentioned above, have been translated and published in Harvey and Yates (eds), *For Peace and Truth: From the Notebooks of Pierre Ceresole* (1954). The International Archives of Service Civil International has produced a number of documents about Ceresole's life and ideas as well as the work of the SCI, with special reference to his experiences and its work in Asia (see for instance Sato 2002).

⁵ According to Monastier, he joined the Society of Friends in 1935 (1946: 32). His letter attached with the application to join the Society of Friends is, however, dated 1 September 1936. For extracts from the letter and correspondence regarding the application, see Bietenholz-Gerhard 1967: 61–65.

⁶ Most of the literature about SCI or Ceresole is written by SCI members, or former members, and 'Friends' (Quakers), for example the President of the SCI (1954) and head of the British branch of the SCI in the 1930s, John W. Harvey, who is editor and translator of Ceresole's letter (see reference to Harvey and Yates 1954). Héléne Monastier, his 'lieutenant', close friend and 'Friend', has written or edited several publication by or about Ceresole (biography by Monastier 1950). A later biography of Ceresole is dedicated to Héléne Monastier (Bietenholz-Gerhard 1962). The work camps in Bihar are described by John Somervell (J. S., also known as 'Jack' among family and friends) Hoyland (1887–1957), Quaker, former missionary, author and friend of both Ceresole and C. F. Andrews (Hoyland 1940).

as widely possible [and] not shut in any way.”⁷ At the same time as he was eager to explore Gandhi’s method and ideas about non-violence, he was disappointed with the Christian churches’ failure to actively work for peace in Europe, a feeling that grew on him during the 1930s and captured in a letter sent from the work camp in Bihar 1937:

*“Follow the truth where it leads’ is a thing sung in hymns but which Christian Churches in a general way are constitutionally incapable of practicing. I have no doubt that the religion of Gandhiji whether it may be truly called ‘Hinduism’ or not – is much superior with its consistent and practical affirmation of ‘Ahimsa’ as foundation for the discovery of a good international political order and with its main tenet ‘Truth is god’ for the free honest and courageous pursuit of truth than anything which the vast majority of the present so called Christian churches may offer.”*⁸

When Ceresole officially joined the Society of Friends, he was convinced by their ideals but held critical objection to certain spiritual practices of “silent service”. As he wrote to Gandhi in 1936, just after he had applied and was still waiting for a reply, his request to join had contained a “very frank letter” about his difficulties with the Society’s spiritual practices (“mysticism is not my strong point”).⁹ If they could not accept his doubts and would refuse him membership, he suggested in a letter to Gandhi that “some great advanced Hindu community might receive me”.¹⁰ Since he was subsequently accepted by the Society of Friends, the question of joining a “Hindu community” would never arise but his words underline Ceresole’s openness towards other schools of thoughts.

Meeting Gandhi, Meeting Mussolini: The Political Application of Cooperation and Non-Cooperation

Three years before the earthquake, Ceresole met Gandhi in Lausanne in 1931. Like many other pacifists at that time, he took great interest in Gandhi’s political philosophy and work against British colonial rule by means of non-cooperation, a method he partially practiced by refusing to pay military tax and was thereby regularly imprisoned for (Monastier 1945: 31). Their meeting and discussions, however, highlighted fundamental differences in the application of

⁷ Letter from Ceresole, Sonathi (Bihar), to Samuel Ched Phillip, 5 May 1937, PC 972.

⁸ Letter from Ceresole, Sonathi (Bihar), to Samuel Ched Phillip, 5 May 1937, PC 972.

⁹ P. Ceresole, Gland (Vaud), Switzerland, to M. K. Gandhi (Ashram, Wardha, C.P.) 28 October 1936, PC 976:5.

¹⁰ P. Ceresole, Gland (Vaud), Switzerland, to M. K. Gandhi (Ashram, Wardha, C.P.) 28 October 1936, PC 976:5.

non-cooperation between the two; yet it appears to have been an exchange that inspired Ceresole with a deeper interest in Gandhi's political struggle and ideals. The two met as Gandhi was staying at Romain Rolland's home in Geneva after the Round Table Conference in London in 1931. Rolland, Nobel Prize laureate in literature in 1915, was a close friend of Ceresole and also a vocal pacifist, whose biography of Gandhi from 1923 made Europe aware of the 'Mahatma' and his work (Francis 1999: 133). Ceresole and other pacifists and conscientious objectors spent a day (9 December 1931) in Lausanne with Gandhi and discussed the "theory and practice of non-violence".¹¹ According to Rolland's diary extracts and correspondence recapturing the meetings, some of Gandhi's statements and ideas seemed to "profoundly shock and disturb" Ceresole and members of the International Civil Service who could not support all his ideas about non-cooperation but had been given "much painful food for thought".¹² The group of staunch pacifists seemed "afraid of everything and everyone, while he [Gandhi] fears nothing." Alongside Gandhi, "Pierre Ceresole and his phalanx of the International Civil Service [i.e. Service Civil International], looked like timid and stammering children".¹³ The main difference of opinion was Gandhi's critic towards the pacifists method of resistance against a state with a "military organization"; according to Gandhi the conscientious objectors still cooperated with the state's military if they supported it in other ways by accepting the services of the state, such as schools, hospitals etc:

*"[...] simply refusing military service is not enough. To refuse military service when the time has come is to leave action until the time available for combating the evil has practically passed. Military service is just a symptom of a deeper evil. All those not inscribed for military service still participate equally in the crime if they support the state in other ways. Anyone who supports, directly or indirectly, a state with a military organization participates in the crime"*¹⁴ (italics in original, edited diary extract).

¹¹ The discussion in the meeting was narrated to Romain Rolland by his sister Madeleine Rolland who was present at the meeting since he could not attend due to health problems. A report of the meeting by Desai is also found in *Young India*, "Letters from Europa (sic)". Gandhi arrived Geneva 6 December 1931. 'Extract from Romain Rolland's Diary (December 1931)' in Romain Rolland and Gandhi, p. 162.

¹² 'Extract from Romain Rolland's Diary (December 1931)' in Romain Rolland and Gandhi, p. 187. Also mentioned in letter "413. Romain Rolland to Lucien Roth (France), 24 December 1931", *Ibid.*, pp. 451–452.

¹³ Letter "413. Romain Rolland to Lucien Roth (France), 24 December 1931", Romain Rolland and Gandhi, pp. 451–452.

¹⁴ 'Extract from Romain Rolland's Diary (December 1931)' in Romain Rolland and Gandhi, p. 185.

Ceresole, contrary to Gandhi, took a partial approach to the method of non-cooperation, arguing that “not everything in the state is bad, and that one can co-operate with the things it does which are good and useful to the community”. Gandhi flipped the argument in his reply, arguing that he had faced this question in the movement of non-co-operation with the colonial government, and had come to the conclusion that “*there is no state, even run by a Nero or a Mussolini, which has no good things in it. But we must reject the whole from the moment we decide not to co-operate with the system*”.¹⁵ Ceresole, acknowledging Gandhi’s experience up against colonial rulers, claimed that there was “a profound difference between an independent nation and a subject nation”, yet defended his position. Gandhi agreed to the difference but clarified his views with regards to getting rid of the “military mentality.” In order to do so, he meant it was necessary to give up privileges, by not sending your children to school, not sending your sick to hospital, not keeping your jobs and your salaries, not using the post and the public services, etc. Finally, “non-payment of tax is too easy, and should not come until much later”, Gandhi stated. This seemingly radical move to publicly announce to refuse to pay military tax now appeared less daring in comparison to Gandhi’s method that rejected any cooperation with a state supportive of violence.¹⁶

Ceresole’s and Gandhi’s respective applications of cooperation and non-cooperation thereby contained not only fundamental differences in its acceptance of violence, but could be counterproductive if cooperation was seen as tool to prevent violence in a situation where non-cooperation was used to protest violence. Ceresole’s conviction that regardless of ideological outlook, cooperation between people and nations was a successful means of achieving peace and preventing war, is evident from his persistent attempts to organise work camps in Germany during the 1930s until the time of his death in 1945. Only three months before the earthquake, he set off and crossed the border in November 1933 with the intention to meet the chancellor Adolf Hitler and make inquiries into the situation in Germany (Ceresole 1934).¹⁷ This might at first

¹⁵ Gandhi cited in letter by Rolland, italics in original, “412. Romain Rolland to Georges Pioch (France), Villeneuve, 23 December 1931”, in Romain Rolland and Gandhi, p. 450. Again, similarly paraphrased in another letter: “417. Romain Rolland to Esther Marchand (France), Villeneuve, 30 December 1931”, *Ibid.*, p. 461.

¹⁶ ‘Extract from Romain Rolland’s Diary (December 1931)’ in Romain Rolland and Gandhi, p. 187.

¹⁷ The contradictions and sometimes blind enthusiasm for his idea transpire from reading the title of the pamphlet he published in 1934, after having visited Germany and India: *En Allemagne et aux Indes pour la paix*. Service Civil International. Chez les réservistes du 246me d’infanterie a Stuttgart; Mon petit-neveu chez le ministre Gøering; Service aux Indes (Ceresole 1934) and later translated to English by a SCI Archives

seem like an unrealistic endeavour, but one should not forget his political connections and family networks that granted him, however briefly, access to fascist leaders as for instance after he returned from his first journey to India in 1934, he met Mussolini with the intention to persuade him about setting up international work camps for peace. In hindsight, and with the benefit of historical research outlining the violence fascism unleashed, such an attempt might have seemed doomed from the very beginning. Ceresole was however acutely aware of the dictator's fascist ideology and preference for violent solutions; indeed, he viewed Mussolini to be on the far end of the other side of the political spectrum, but nevertheless he was regarded a potential cooperation partner.¹⁸ In the light of this display of his seemingly utopian belief in the power of relationships developed at works camps – no matter what other differences may have prevailed – the endeavor to initiate work camps with European volunteers in Bihar comes across as less of a wonder.

The Role of Political Agendas and Political Networks

Ceresole introduced the idea of setting up work camps in Bihar to C. F. Andrews with the help of his friend Lilian Stevenson, a close friend and Irish-woman in the U.K.¹⁹ Well-connected among Quakers and missionaries in the U.K., her enterprise in introducing the idea to C. F. Andrews and a number of Quakers who were also members of the "Indian Conciliation Committee",²⁰ i.e. the 'Indian Conciliation Group' (ICG) would be crucial for implementing the work camps in India as they saw it as a cooperation that served their political

volunteer, see Palmer s.d., *In Germany and India for Peace*. Service Civil International. With the Reservists of the 246th Infantry in Stuttgart. My Great-Nephew with Minister Goering. A Workcamp in India.

¹⁸ "[Mussolini] did not seem to notice the contradictions and the logical gaps in his standpoint. They do not interest him. Nevertheless I have the impression to have done as much as I could and what I had to do. I think with gratefulness on this peaceful and pleasant conversation with the man whose principles in reality condemn us to death." Pierre Ceresole's *Besuch bei Mussolini*, am 23. Okt. 1934. Gekürzt aus Ceresole's Briefen. s.d., *La Chau-de-Fonds* City Library, International Archives of Service Civil International (SCI) 10101 (in German).

¹⁹ Stevenson was one of the founders of the Fellowship of Reconciliation in 1914. Together with her brother, a missionary who had worked in Gujarat, she had taken part in famine relief activities in India. P. Ceresole to M. K. Gandhi, Geneva, 30 March 1934, PC 976: 5. Copy of letter from the Reverend W. E. S. Holland to L. Stevenson, 17 March 1934, PC 906.

²⁰ Later in the summer of 1934 or 1935, Ceresole had at least one meeting planned with the group, to which 60 members were invited. 'Indian Conciliation Committee Meeting with Pierre Ceresole' on 13 June, 14 June, 19 June [no year mentioned, presumably from 1935 since Ceresole was in Bihar in June 1934], PC 1042.

agenda. The ICG, a loosely knit group of informal character, formed in Oxford in connection with the Round Table Conference in London in 1931 where its principal members had come to provide support for M. K. Gandhi at the conference (Tinker 1976: 226). On the incentive of Carl Heath, the president of the Society of Friends in London, the group of mainly Quakers began meeting in mid-October 1931, to discuss how to best inform the British public about developments in India (Carnall 2010: 102). Heath acted as a chairman, and the foundational members were C. F. Andrews, Henry Polak, and not to forget, Agatha Harrison in the role of secretary. The membership was informal and *ad hoc*, likewise the financial support for travel costs and secretarial tasks largely consisted of donations by its wealthier members. Though the group's principal idea was to work for conciliation between the British Government and Indian nationalists, it mainly focused on its closest link, M. K. Gandhi, whom they tended to equate with nationalist politics in India (Tinker 1976: 225–227; Carnall 2010: 102). Andrews was the one who first grasped the possibility of using Ceresole reconstruction camps to further the aims of the ICG by displaying the willingness of Indian nationalists to cooperate with the colonial government.²¹ Cooperation in the relief work between the BCRC and the government was at that time (March 1934) being negotiated, and according to Andrews, “every gesture from non-British sources is a help in the appeasement of India”,²² could possibly help in balancing the unstable relationship.

Ceresole's close relationship with the British Quaker communities began with the inception of SCI. When Ceresole founded the SCI in 1920, he did so after gaining support for his vision of an international civil service among the communities of Christian pacifists, many of them Quakers, at the conferences of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation in Bilthoven in 1919 and 1920 (Rodriguez 2000: 2–3). It was organised pacifism guided by Christian ethics in the context of World War I that spurred him into setting up the SCI, yet his biographers and his diary entries claim that his dedication to follow a spiritual path began much earlier with private spiritual experiences as a teenager (Bietenholz-Gerhard 1962: 7). Until 1917, Ceresole had paid the taxes for men exempt from military service but the decision to refuse to pay these taxes led to estrangement from “many friends” and prison sentences (Harvey & Yates 1954 : 59–61). To him, military tax indirectly meant a contribution to war, which he,

²¹ Carl Heath, London, to Bertram Pickard, Geneva, copy sent to P. Ceresole, 12 March 1934, PC 903: 1; C. Heath, London, to B. Pickard, Geneva, copy sent to P. Ceresole, 19 March 1934, PC 903: 2.

²² C. Heath citing Andrews' support of the cause. C. Heath to B. Pickard, 19 March 1934, PC 903: 2.

according to his biographer Monastier, found to be against his Christian consciousness and an act of “idolising” the nation-state (Monastier 1945: 31). Even if the outbreak of World War I had deeply strengthened Ceresole’s Christian pacifist ideology he did not find a platform to share his ideas about an international civil service until the conferences in Bilthoven (Archives Documentation 2010: 5). Similar to SCI, these Christian associations organised a wide range of social activities for which the energies of the youth, instead of being used in warfare, were mobilized in something akin to a Franciscan tertiary order (den Boggende 2004: 609, 613). To begin with Ceresole referred to the first work camps as “international civil service” for “peace constructive” work.²³ The original name, however, was ‘*Service Civil*’ and the organization did not gather momentum until in 1924 when it took the name of ‘Service Civil International’ (Harvey & Yates 1954: 79). At this point of time, the growth and institutionalisation of the SCI is likely to have been fuelled by the failure to legislate for civil service as an alternative to military service in Switzerland. A petition with 40,000 signatures for the provision of civil service as a legal provision for conscientious objectors fell through in 1923 (Ceresole 1924: no page), which although rejected, bear witness to the contemporary interest in alternatives to military service (Harvey & Yates 1954: 77–78). In 1928 the organisational scope of Ceresole’s endeavour increased: SCI organised the first major international work camps with 710 volunteers from 28 countries after heavy floods in the Rhine Valley of Lichtenstein (Andrews 1935: 119; SCI timetable 20th century). The same year Ceresole argued for civil service as a manifestation of active pacifism, an alternative to military service and an antidote to war, where “faith and service” based on the principles of non-violence and physical labour laid the foundation for SCI’s etho (Schermerhorn & Ceresole 1928: 336–337). To Ceresole, Quaker work camps served as an inspirational model for developing a community service that promoted “friendship” and advocated “international reconciliation”. SCI would however come to differ mainly with the Quaker ideas of work camps in its emphasis on fostering an *international* community spirit (Schermerhorn & Ceresole 1928: 336–337).

The political and international context in India thereby posed a completely different scenario of ‘reconciliation’. ICG members were well aware of political tensions and possible friction in organising any kind of cooperation between European pacifists, the colonial government and Indian nationalists. This is evident from the advice given to Ceresole not to mention Edmond Privat in connection with the plan, a close friend of his who had at first come up with

²³ To begin with, in Lichtenstein, France and Switzerland, and England (Ceresole, 1934 / Trans. by Palmer s.d., p. 1).

the idea of setting up SCI camps in India.²⁴ Staunch in his criticism of British politics in India, Privat had fallen into disfavour with the British government.²⁵ Mentioning Privat's name, as a member of the ICG said, "would not help us with the Government of India", and in support of the government's perception of Privat, he too felt that "he [Edmond Privat] only saw one side of the shield."²⁶ Thus, the ICG's sensibilities in navigating the political environment guided as well as restricted Ceresole in choosing cooperation partners.

C. F. Andrews was the ideal facilitator for the envisioned work camps, not only because of his central role in the Indian Conciliation Group and as one of the closest European friends of Gandhi,²⁷ but also as the foremost campaigner for earthquake relief funds upon personal requests by Rabindranath Tagore, M. K. Gandhi and Rajendra Prasad (Chaturvedi & Sykes 1949: 276). After Andrews had gained the support of the leading ICG members for Ceresole's plan, he hurried to Switzerland to help Ceresole prepare for India by introducing him to a number of Indian politicians and their networks, which effectively set up the arrangements for Ceresole's arrival in India.²⁸ Having secured the support of Rajendra Prasad, Ceresole had already in Geneva prepared for meetings between the Government of Bihar and Orissa, the BCRC and the SCI.²⁹ In Patna, he met with government officials, first the Relief Commissioner Brett who had

²⁴ According to Ceresole, Edmond Privat had sent him a note: "What about our Indian friends in Behar [i.e. Bihar]? Is the I[nternational].V[oluntary]. S[ervice]. not going to move?" P. Ceresole, Geneva, to M. K. Gandhi, 30 March 1934, PC 976: 5. See also Andrews and Ceresole 1935, p. 62.

²⁵ Privat actively worked for India's independence from 1932 to 1939 in the role as chairman for "the European Committee for India's Independence" which he founded upon his return to Switzerland after a tour in India with M. K. Gandhi (Roy Choudhury 1976: 7). In 1932, Privat criticized British colonial policy; this had apparently given him a bad name with the British government. Copy of letter from R. M. Gray [Reverend Robert M. Gray] to Lilian Stevenson, 14 March 1934, PC 905. According to Stevenson, C. F. Andrews agreed with Gray's standpoint that it was better to keep Privat's name out of the plan. 'Information about Bihar given by C.F. Andrews to Lilian Stevenson', 16 March 1934, L. Stevenson to P. Ceresole, and with his notes. PC 990.

²⁶ Copy of letter from R.M. Gray to L. Stevenson, forwarded to P. Ceresole, 14 March 1934, PC 905.

²⁷ In later accounts from 1935, the respective narratives of Andrews and Ceresole credited the other with extending a "request" or an "offer" for relief workers to be sent to Bihar. (Ceresole in Appendix 'A Letter from Pierre Ceresole' in Andrews 1935, pp. 118, 123)

²⁸ Questions by Ceresole prepared for a meeting with Andrews in March 1934 (with notes), 22 March 1934, PC 1053. "Lettre Générale II, Bombay 25 April 1934" in Andrews and Ceresole 1935, pp. 50, 56; Andrews 1935, pp. 11, 118–119.

²⁹ However, Ceresole's stay was overshadowed by the passing away of Rajendra Prasad's brother Mahendra Prasad, leaving little time for Rajendra Prasad to discuss the matter with Ceresole. R. Prasad to P. Ceresole, P.O. Zeradai, 6 June 1934, PC 865:3.

been informed about his plans by the Information Bureau in Simla (Andrews & Ceresole 1935: 56). Not only ICG's good connections with Indian nationalists proved to ease the work of Ceresole and the SCI; their contacts also included influential persons high up in the British administration at the India Office. Spreading information and getting access to high officials was the ICG's main strengths, according to Tinker (1976: 225), an asset well tendered for the SCI work camps. In the context of ICG's informal networking with British colonial officials, they emphasised Ceresole's family of 'influence and standing', most notably his father, a Colonel in the Swiss army and a federal judge, was the President of the Swiss Confederation in 1873 (Hoyland 1940: 101), as well as his profession as an engineer and mathematician with degrees in mechanical engineering from the university in Zürich and post-graduate work in mathematics and physics at the universities in Göttingen and Munich (Harvey & Yates 1954: 16–17). In New Delhi, Agatha Harrison, the secretary of the India Conciliation Group,³⁰ had approached the government and requested to information about Ceresole's visit to be passed on to the Government of Bihar and Orissa. Boiled down by the India Office, information about his status as "a Swiss of good family and a pacifist", a man with connections in Europe, the son of a former President of the Swiss confederation was passed on to the Government of India. The account described his work as a way "to give practical expression to the international co-operation movement." In addition to the unequivocally supportive information provided by the ICG, the India Office cautioned the Government of India to pay attention to his whereabouts and "keep him the right way" but thought him unlikely to be "troublesome politically".³¹ ICG's heavy lobbying for Ceresole's work as that of a pacifist and of having practical concern for the earthquake victims helped to portray his work as non-political. His reluctance to associate himself with political parties is reflected in the Local Government's description of him as "a friend of Gandhi, Prasad and Andrews, but not necessarily pro-Congress."³² Although Ceresole's movements and contacts were monitored by sub-inspectors³³ and the Commissioner of Tirhut,³⁴ his elevated status evidently protected him as "strict orders" prevented the police from

³⁰ 'Agatha Harrison's visit to India' *The Friend*, 30 July 1934, p. 669.

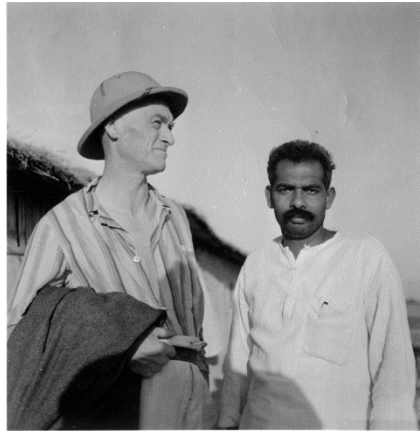
³¹ H. MacGregor to I. M. Stephenson (Director, Public Information, Home Department., New Delhi, Government of India.) Air mail, Information Officer's Department. India Office, Whitehall, London, 10 April, 1934.

³² 'Visit of Pierre Ceresole, a Swiss, to the earthquake areas of Bihar.' April 1934, Patna, Bihar State Archives (BSA), Political Department – Special Branch (PS) 94–1934.

³³ Copy of a Special Branch Sub-inspector's report dated Patna, 15 December 1934, BSA, PS 140–1934.

³⁴ G (?) to Scott, DO NO 1433-C, 1 April 1935, BSA, PS 5–1935.

interfering in his work.³⁵ Even after some of the camp's workers were accused of a minor dacoity and relief distribution was believed of going towards "political agents", the police was told "not to antagonize" people from his work camp.³⁶ The ICG were in this way instrumental in facilitating Ceresole's good relationship with the government by introducing him in a politically favourable light.



*Die beiden
Manager*

Fig. 1: "The two managers" ("Die beiden Manager"), Pierre Ceresole and Phanindra Mohan Dutta at Sonathi centre, also called Shantipur, the "Peace Village" (Photo album 'Zivildienst in Indien', section two 'Im Camp', 1935, SCI 60501:1)

Before sending volunteers to work in Bihar, Ceresole had with the help of Andrews first to convince the members of the ICG who were from the outset divided in the vision of what the undertaking could achieve.³⁷ The idea of peace

³⁵ C.B.D. Murray, police superintendent, Muzaffarpur to Ceresole. Answer to letter of 22 December 1934, 23 December 1934, PC 943: 1.

³⁶ Extract from the DIG's (CID) weekly report, Sd/- R.E. Russell, 8 January 1935, also mentioned in the April and September reports, BSA, PS 5-35.

³⁷ Ceresole, in a letter to M. K. Gandhi (30 March 1934) listed a number of persons in support of the plan: "Percy Bartlett, secretary of the British F.O.R.; Carl Heath of the Friends International Service; Bertram Pickard, secretary of the Friends center in Geneva; Herbert Gray, leader of the "Peace Army" in London; R. M. Gray, his brother, formerly missionary in India; W. E. S. Holland, formerly head of a Missionary College in

building by cooperation needed explanation since they perceived the work camps as a means for providing material aid to the earthquake sufferers. One of the very few publications focusing on SCI in South Asia, the chapter 'Friedensarbeit und Dritte Welt. Der Service Civil International (SCI) in Indien, 1934-1937 und ab 1950' ('Peace Work and the Third World. Service Civil International (SCI) in India, 1934-1937 and from 1950') by Regina Müller argues that M. K. Gandhi's work with "untouchables" and socio-economic village improvement programmes inspired Ceresole to build "model villages" and thereby shift the organisational focus to material outcomes rather than mainly peace building and reconciliation in the "third world" (Müller 1993: 49). According to sources utilized for this article, Gandhi's political application of non-violence and non-cooperation served as inspiration to Ceresole, but a change in the organizational goals was mainly due to the fact that the camps were run largely by the BCRC and only a small number of European volunteers participated. The number of European volunteers were only a handful due to the cost involved in the passage to India, and not since labor in India was cheap, as Müller appears to have argued (1993: 50).

The cost of volunteers and the role of Europeans as worker or leaders were however concerns raised by members of the ICG. C. F. Andrews' enthusiasm for the work camps as "above material help" was important in order to convince Carl Heath, the influential co-founder of the ICG, its chairman and the president of the Society of Friends in London.³⁸ Heath's first reply upon hearing about the idea was outright in the negative: it was impractical and expensive to send labour, enough relief fund collections were in place and the "Imperial government" had taken action in administering funds, besides there were "hundreds of capable Indian people to engage", and therefore the cost of sending volunteers all the way from Europe made little sense.³⁹ After having met with Andrews only a few days later, his attitude towards the idea had changed completely. Heath was however still worried that this "help" in the form of reconstruction camps might be misinterpreted. Apart from practical inconveniences for the Europeans, such as the approaching heat and the infrastructural

India; Jack [J.S.] Hoyland, author of prayers for an Indian College; Horace Alexander, Mr. Polak, Alec Wilson." In addition Romain Rolland, as well as "the [International] Committee for India" in Geneva with the members Madeleine Rolland, Mrs. Hörup Madame Kretschmer, de Light, also supported the idea. Letter, Pierre Ceresole to M. K. Gandhi, 30 March 1934, PC 976: 5.

³⁸ C. Heath, London, to B. Pickard, Geneva, copy sent to P. Ceresole, 12 March 1934, PC 903: 1; C. Heath, London, to B. Pickard, Geneva, copy sent to P. Ceresole, 19 March 1934, PC 903: 2.

³⁹ C. Heath to B. Pickard, 12 March 1934, (copy sent to P. Ceresole), PC 903: 1.

breakdown in the earthquake area, the endeavour might be regarded as having what he called a “dominating attitude”. Even though Heath understood that the people involved claimed to have no such intention, he meant that “the fact of people going, and being Europeans, might have that sort of tendency”.⁴⁰ Confirming Carl Heath’s suspicion that sending European volunteers might be understood as a paternalistic enterprise rather than as the intended act of solidarity, other ICG members regarded the role of European volunteers as resembling leaders or supervisors. Doubts regarding the Europeans’ roles as anything but supervisors were expressed in other comments, more explicitly stating the perceived differences between Indians and Europeans. Percy W. Bartlett, an active Quaker and leading member of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (Bartlett 1932), had initially discarded the idea of SCI going to Bihar for several reasons – the hot season was coming, the amount spent on the journey to India would by far surpass the value of the labour provided by the Europeans, while “there is no lack, far from it, of labour [in Bihar and/or India].”⁴¹ As criticism against the cost of sending volunteers from Europe to India was common, Andrews’ enthusiasm for Ceresole’s plan as “extending beyond material help” helped to convince them to support the endeavour.⁴² Ceresole was well aware of not only the ICG members’, but also the public’s common conception that sending Europeans to Bihar as volunteers would financially be a wasteful project. When questioned about the sense in sending more or less unskilled volunteers all the way from Europe to Bihar, considering the costs of such an endeavour, Ceresole described the work as “beyond and above material help” (Ceresole in Andrews 1935: 125).

The power relationship between Europeans and Indians was of concern to Andrews who shared Ceresole’s understanding that cooperation between Indians and Europeans was central to the plan. Later as he outlined the motivations for the first volunteers to be sent, he emphasised that it was important for the Europeans to work side-by-side with the Indian workers, not taking the role of leaders. He had from the outset emphasised that if sending Europeans to India,

*“[they were] not going to ‘direct a sector’ [...] but [should be] ready to serve under the Indians and to be mixed and scattered among them, [and] not work in a ‘block’ of themselves.”*⁴³

⁴⁰ C. Heath to B. Pickard, 19 March 1934, (copy sent to P. Ceresole), PC 903: 2.

⁴¹ Copy of letter from Percy W. Bartlett, to Lilian Stevenson, 13 March 1934 (copy sent to P. Ceresole), PC 904: 1.

⁴² C. Heath to B. Pickard, 19 March 1934, PC 903: 2.

⁴³ C. F. Andrews to L. Stevenson, 31 July 1934, PC 930: 2.

In order to prevent work conditions where Indians acted as workers and Europeans as leaders in the envisioned work camps, C. F. Andrews unofficially made it clear to the ICG and Ceresole that certain preconditions had to be fulfilled for a volunteer to be considered. A volunteer would have to accept “to serve under Indian leadership, as well as to lead any such work”, and “no leader will go out from Europe who is unacceptable in India itself.”⁴⁴ Apart from Ceresole’s appreciation of the peasants’ positive attitude to having European volunteers (Ceresole in Andrews 1935: 125), little is known about the reception of the idea among the earthquake-affected in Bihar. Ceresole described the work in Bihar as an extension of the voluntary “peace service” in Europe in terms of methods and desired outcome (Ceresole in Andrews 1935: 125), yet it is unclear if the idea was further explained to the Indian workers who took part.

Despite Andrews’ and Ceresole’s initial intention to make European volunteers work together with Indian local workers, the European volunteers were in the end only a handful of so-called “leaders”. In the end, the cost of the journey to India restricted the number of volunteers from Europe to India, although Ceresole to no avail tried to get a “working passage” for the recruited team members.⁴⁵ Upon returning to Europe from his first visit to Bihar, Ceresole explained to the media that he had no plans of “recruiting bands of relief workers in Europe”, but would assign one man of “wide international and practical outlook” to lead “a band of fifty Indian peasants”. This man would be required to labour, “to work together on the hard manual work needed with spade and basket”. In addition there would be an interpreter present and enough funds to support the workers for six months.⁴⁶ Despite the contradictory guidelines regarding the nature of the work the European volunteers would take on, Ceresole held on to his vision of Europeans taking part in the manual labour, like in the work camps carried out in Europe.

Conclusion: Cooperation as “Beyond and Above Material Help”

The work camps in Bihar were to a great extent made possible by Ceresole’s connection with British Quakers, a relationship based on their shared dedication for pacifism. The Quakers in the extended friend circles of Ceresole were at the same time engaged in colonial politics through the Indian Conciliation

⁴⁴ C. F. Andrews to L. Stevenson, 31 July 1934, PC 930: 2.

⁴⁵ The attempt to acquire “working passages” was carried out with the help of A. D. Henderson and Percy Bartlett. A. D. Henderson to Percy Bartlett, London, 28 August 1934, PC 936; Geo. Hancock (Aberdeen & Commonwealth Line) to A. D. Henderson, London, 27 August 1934; Geo. Hancock (Aberdeen & Commonwealth Line) to A. D. Henderson, London, 22 August 1934, PC 937.

⁴⁶ ‘A Plan for Indian Earthquake Relief’, *The Friend*, 27 July 1934, p. 686.

Group, by them viewed as a form of pacifist work in informal diplomacy to conciliation. For Ceresole and the SCI, the ICG's influence by lobbying and networking helped to set up the cooperation with the local Indian nationalists in Bihar as well as with the colonial government. Contrary to Ceresole, who was outspokenly apolitical in his application of reconciliation, ICG had a political agenda of conciliation that strived to avoid public confrontation between the colonial government and Indian nationalists. Ceresole's vision of the work camps' reconciliatory effect between the colonial government and Indian nationalist was in this regard used as a political tool by the ICG, as a display and a means to 'show' that cooperation was possible, rather than them being concerned with actual improved relations.

The idea of work camps as a space where 'friendship' between participants would lead to reconciliation and peace building, was not only doubted as feasible in the case of India but sending international volunteers turned out to be financially unviable due to the travel costs. Although the organisers involved in sending international volunteers accepted the idea to be "beyond and above material help" as Ceresole emphasized (in Andrews 1935: 125), many questioned if it was possible for the Europeans to have a friendly cooperation without dominating or being perceived as imposing themselves on Indians. The suitability of the volunteers in terms of understanding the political situation and showing a willingness to work with Indians rather than giving orders was therefore a primary concern. In the European context the international volunteers and local workers cooperated in rebuilding material assets and relations to reconcile losses in war and disasters, while in India, Europeans labouring together with Indians turned out to be envisioned as a minor component of the work camps.

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