

# Teaching Solidarity

by P. Laroque

*The author of the following important article is president of the Section sociale du Conseil d'Etat français. When, in 1968, he was awarded the René Sand prize at the fourteenth International Conference of the International Council on Social Welfare he delivered a speech on "Human Rights, Social Work and Social Policy" <sup>1</sup>.*

*The Red Cross was represented not only because many of the delegates were members of our movement but also because the ceremony recalled the memory of René Sand, who had been a leading light of the Belgian Red Cross. International Review has published several of his writings, one of which he concluded with the following words revealing the active idealism which was typical of him : " The human instinct, which sometimes goes astray but is more often led astray, tends towards goodwill and peace, not towards war ".*

*We are grateful to the René Sand prize-winner for having also contributed to our publication.*

(Ed.)

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Technical and economic progress ever more strongly intensifies interdependence among men. Whereas for centuries men lived in small closed societies, modern progress in the communication of information and ideas and in the development of trade has favoured

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<sup>1</sup> Our translation.

a growing interpenetration between groups and civilizations while, at the same time, increasing the division of labour. Every single person is, whether directly or indirectly, constantly making use of knowledge and skills acquired from almost all parts of the world; his ideas are the results of clashes or combinations of opinions expressed in places widely separated from each other; he consumes products, goods and services from every continent. These facts are so obvious that they are commonplace.

Even so, man has rarely been aware of this interdependence, and even less so of the responsibilities it implies; that is to say, the solidarity necessitated by that mutual dependence which, every day, brings men closer together throughout the world. The psychological and moral development of mankind has not kept pace with technical and economic progress. This dichotomy is doubtless the basic cause of the ills and conflicts that beset the world to-day.

In its present form, this dichotomy appears to be the result of peculiar changes, produced by successive and contradictory currents throughout the centuries, traces of which have subsisted into the present day.

For a very long time, probably many millennia, man, as an individual, counted for nothing. He had no legal, economic or social existence, except as a member of the group to which he belonged. Only collective units were recognized: the family, comprising several generations united by blood or marriage; the tribe, frequently little more than a large family; and later the professional grouping, the trade guild, caste, etc. The individual had no rights. His existence depended on the place he occupied within his group and on the place this group occupied in economic and social life. Within the group itself, there was total interdependence and solidarity.

The type of family traditionally found in rural and cottage-industry environments is well known. It is still flourishing in the countries that are just starting their economic development and provides an explanation for certain aspects of human relationship in advanced societies. This type of family is an economic unit, inextricably merged in an agricultural undertaking or a handicraft workshop, in which each person's role is largely determined by his position in the undertaking that supports the group. It is a centre of

education, the provider of the vocational, moral and social training of its members. Such training is entirely directed towards preparing each individual for the task he will have to fulfil within the family group; accumulated knowledge, customs and traditions are passed down from generation to generation. The family provides security, naturally ensuring through the work of the active members sufficient sustenance for non-workers, the children, the sick, the invalids and the old. It thus plays the role of a modern social security system. It draws its members together in their pastimes and in their religious life. The family does not merely intimately bind all its members—it totally absorbs them. Hierarchical relationships, marriages, relations between spouses and between the parents and children are entirely controlled by the family. Tribal bonds, allowing of course for the differences caused by size, are of the same nature.

Among families or between separate tribal groups, on the other hand, relations are often very distant, that is, where they exist at all. The initial tendency is for each group to be self-sufficient. It is the need for defence against a common enemy which induces families or tribes to join on a more or less permanent basis and accept an overall discipline. European feudalism is a good example of this. However, although real solidarity is thus established between families united by the same interest, it rarely attains the same depth or stability as within the family or tribe.

Human societies are therefore not initially composed of individuals but of small groups, in which the individual is totally submerged and where there are precise, complex and restrictive rules permanently defining the tasks and responsibilities of each person.

One might have thought that technical and economic development, by broadening horizons, would have led simultaneously to a broadening of the framework within which solidarity amongst men grows. This has only been partly the case.

Most certainly an awareness of their community of interests by the members of a given trade has encouraged the establishment of corporate groups which, particularly at the craft level, has enclosed family cottage industries in ever more complex systems. The development of urban life has also, most certainly, contributed to the creation of a not infrequently intensive communal life and a pro-

found internal solidarity within the collectivity. And though the authority of dynamic rulers encouraged the creation of States, foreshadowing the political structures of the modern world, it is certain that those States, initially somewhat artificial creations of the monarchy, became more and more real through the ties created within them by administrative and economic mechanisms set up by the central authority. It would, however, be too much to claim that, within a State or in States under the same ruler, there has often existed a deep feeling of solidarity between one guild and another or one town and another.

As such solidarity began to take shape and in so far as it could have asserted itself, it met, especially from the XVIIIth century onwards, economic and ideological conditions which, spreading from Europe, diametrically opposed it.

The extension of individual ownership had contributed to the weakening of both family and community solidarity. As soon as property belonging to a family began to be divided up among the members of the group, or communal land was divided up among the families that formerly shared it or again when the tribal livestock was divided up amongst families and even among individual members of those families, the whole economic foundation of the traditional grouping was shaken. The interest of the individual usually predominated over that of the group and such a tendency could not but grow with the extension of personal property, the division of which was much easier than that of land.

It was, however, the remarkable upsurge of political and economic liberalism, especially after the French Revolution in 1789, that led to the increasing pre-eminence of the individual. The restrictions imposed by the old political regimes began to appear intolerable, no doubt to a large extent because they were not the product of deeply felt solidarity. In any case, all collective controls and all groups of whatever kind were condemned in the name of the freedom of the individual, since any group *ipso facto* postulates discipline and therefore restriction of freedom. All men are free and equal in the eyes of the law. This is not wishful thinking—it is a natural state of affairs. Anything that restricts this freedom is to be excluded in that it goes against “nature”. There are and should only be free individuals who, by their own free and equal wills,

decide to unite under a "social contract" that forms the basis of the organization of society. Hence the abolition of the administrative rules of the state or local authority, of trade guilds and of those family restrictions that shackle the individual. It means uprooting the age-old foundations of society. The individual was nothing—now he is everything. The natural solidarity of family, tribal or local groups is itself condemned. Even voluntary organization of solidarity within freely formed groups was rejected, since such groups, whether for economic, social or cultural reasons, were liable to infringe the liberty of their members through the obligations that membership involved. Freedom of association was never mentioned in the declarations of rights of that period.

The economic system built on this ideological foundation further increased this exclusion of solidarity. It was totally based on free competition which was held to provide the necessary conditions for progress. Stress was placed on competition: the more severe it became, the greater were the chances that advances would take place. It was the very antithesis of solidarity. Each man, having equal rights and being free to decide, had to make his own place in society through his own efforts. He must not count on others. The rule was: "Every man for himself"—a rule which was justified both by economic development and the legal and moral principles at the basis of society. Such was the philosophy of the liberal bourgeoisie, which controlled the whole economic and social organization of the advanced countries of the XIXth century. In such a philosophy there was no place for interdependence or solidarity either on the national or, *a fortiori*, on the international level. There was room for nothing but conflict and competition. It is remarkable that social co-operation did not completely disappear in societies where such a philosophy prevailed. The explanation is doubtless largely to be found in the ruling class's concern to organize the defence of the existing order. We should not forget that for a long time welfare action was mainly destined to preserve public order. It was not by chance that the "hospitaux généraux" or the "dépôts de mendicité" in France and the "workhouses" in Britain approached the charitable institution and at the same time a kind of prison. All the poor were considered to be a threat to public order. Although it was a duty to help them, it was even more important

to protect oneself against them. This tendency was reinforced by the evolution of ideas in the XIXth century. If all men are free and equal and if, therefore, each is responsible for his own destiny, he who fails is guilty, since he has not striven as he should have done to obtain a better place in society. The concept of the "guilt of the poor" ran deep in the philosophy of the ruling classes at that time and eased their consciences a good deal. Welfare action was, therefore, not so much a demonstration of solidarity as a largely repressive attempt to protect society against those men who, having committed the crime of failing to make a success of their lives, threaten it.

It would, however, be unfair not to recognize that this attitude was often relaxed for moral reasons such as the concern to come to the aid of the weak, those unable to make the necessary efforts to succeed in life. The XIXth century also saw the spread of charitable organizations, frequently of a religious nature, but in any case reflecting the more or less vague sense of responsibility and moral duty of the rich towards the poor.

Thus, a kind of solidarity took shape, but it differed considerably from its predecessors. On the one hand, those who supported the established order became more or less aware of their interdependence with the social classes that were threatening that order and they sought means to offset that threat. On the other hand, the moneyed classes, without recognizing their solidarity with the poorer members of the population, assumed a certain moral obligation to help them. Neither point of view admitted to any natural solidarity among men, but only to a deliberate, co-ordinated effort to remedy certain imperfections in the organization of society.

While the concrete results achieved by this form of solidarity during the XIXth century should not be under-estimated, that solidarity should not be considered as adequate to meet the needs of the modern world. It was, in fact, the unilateral action of a wealthy minority for the masses, with which it had very little contact. It implied a vertical relationship between superior and inferior, excluding the very concept of interdependence. It was also restricted to relatively small geographical units, most often local, sometimes regional, rarely national, whereas present-day interdependence among men covers the whole of humanity. While

it did express the desire to aid the needy, it did not really express any profound or conscious feeling.

The end of the XIXth century and the beginning of the XXth saw the appearance of a new aspect of solidarity among men; it was an increasingly conscious solidarity, if not in all the socially and materially under-privileged, at least among a fair proportion of them. It was perhaps first and foremost the solidarity which found expression in the working-class movement, the realization among the vast wage-earning masses of their independence in the industrial world, as well as their awareness of the possibilities offered by their collective efforts. Later, there emerged the feeling of solidarity felt sometimes vaguely today by the peoples of under-developed or developing countries in dealing with the older, developed countries. It is natural for solidarity first to be felt by those whose isolation is a source of weakness and who can find hope for progress only in uniting their forces.

However, apart from these new tendencies, the success of socialist or socializing ideas since the second half of the XIXth century, as the conventional liberal ideology weakened, laid an ever-increasing emphasis on the responsibility of the collectivity, of the whole of society, towards its members. It was becoming more and more apparent that the weak were not criminals, but victims, that the law of competition, that is to say the idea that might was right, was not always, indeed was hardly ever, a just law. The desire for justice that was deeply felt by all men, and which was becoming more demanding as technical and economic progress brought the attainment of such justice within the realm of possibility, called for an ever-increasing social effort which could only be rooted in an ever-extending solidarity.

The broadening of the framework within which solidarity among men must be organized if it is to reach the highest degree of efficiency is but one of the manifestations of the growing interdependence of individuals in modern economic and social life. It is no longer possible to expect to improve man's lot through individual help, or even through efforts organized on a local basis within an undertaking or a trade. The repercussions of the measures taken on other geographical or occupational sectors, because of their very interdependence, would require the generalization, or at least the

harmonization of efforts. Nowadays, any social policy cannot but be a national policy. Tomorrow it will have to be an international policy. Is this not already expressed in the Treaty of Rome, which obliges the member countries of the European Economic Community to harmonize their social legislations? Is it not also, on a more general level, the very basis of the action undertaken by the International Labour Organisation since 1919?

Although this is the result of technical, economic and social necessities, since all the citizens of a country are closely interdependent and since this interdependence extends to men of different nations, it must be recognized that people are largely unaware of the solidarity that results from it. Within a family, an undertaking, a local grouping or an occupational group, daily personal relations, direct interchanges of ideas and services and the close community of interests and preoccupations almost naturally create reciprocal bonds of solidarity. Individuals become aware of the repercussions upon themselves of what happens to their neighbours. As the framework within which it must be organized broadens, solidarity is felt less and less. An effort must be made to understand and to admit that the lives of people several hundred or several thousand miles away and completely unknown to us can have repercussions on our own situation. Some do make this effort, all the more easily as they feel the weakness of their isolation. Others, more or less openly, refuse to do so, because it clashes with their privileged situation and perhaps could give them an uneasy conscience. One factor working against this awakening is the ever-growing shift from the working to the middle classes. No one likes to have his material and spiritual security disturbed. Naturally, such a disinclination is all the stronger when the solidarity involved concerns persons who belong to other races, living on far-flung continents, with whom there is but little affinity.

Hence the dichotomy: the increasing interdependence uniting all men nationally, internationally or on a world scale, on the one hand, and the insufficient awareness of the solidarity which that interdependence implies. There is inconvenience and danger in that dimorphous trend.

In the first place it was the resurgence of liberal ideas during the most recent period, the renewed confidence displayed, at least

in some countries, in free enterprise and market forces, which was the origin of a conflict between that tendency and the need for greater collective organizational effort to achieve solidarity in order to solve the social and human problems arising from contemporary evolutionary trends. This more or less latent conflict is detrimental to the efficacy of social policies and gives rise to a vague disquiet the real causes of which are frequently unrecognized.

Moreover, to the extent that social policies are not supported by the conscious solidarity of the populations they affect, to the extent that the reasoned actions decided by those in power are not recognized by the populations as the expression of their common will, the constraints which they imply are borne unwillingly and sometimes rejected. In any case, they might entail the institution of administrative machinery which, for the very reason that it is not backed up by the will of the people, tends to assume a purely bureaucratic character devoid of soul or human feeling.

At the same time, the under-privileged sections of the population, aware of their interdependence with the wealthier classes, feel that it is not recognized by the more affluent and that any claims they might make to the solidarity implied by such interdependence only come up against a brick wall. Very likely, they may get exasperated. Lack of understanding between each section, like that between the advanced and the developing populations, is aggravated, with the attendant risks which are inevitable and are already apparent. Social conflicts within each country, the claims by the countries of the Third World and the often strong antagonism they show against the privileged countries, are, *inter alia*, manifestations of that situation.

Experience has shown, incidentally, that conflicts between law and fact, particularly between technical and economic evolution on the one hand and psychological evolution on the other, always generate disturbances, conflict and war. Here lies the problem. Interdependence among men is a fact. But it is not translated, or only inadequately, into the legal organization of solidarity among men. And above all it does not find expression, at a psychological and moral level, in an awareness of the solidarity implied by that interdependence.

It might be thought that a remedy to this situation could be sought in the setting up of legal machinery to translate recognized interdependence into law. Various legislations offer examples of efforts to achieve that, either through the association of national workers' organizations in the management of economic and social interests, in the negotiation of agreements and in the resolving of disputes or by setting up national social security systems. Provided such systems extend to the whole population they do bring about effective and complete solidarity within that population as distinct from systems or institutions which are restricted to one or more enterprises or professional groups. Such institutions undoubtedly contribute to creating awareness of a form of solidarity which does not manifest itself spontaneously. But they are often inadequate and likely to resemble those bureaucratic and soulless administrations to which I referred earlier.

It is the entire spirit of the population that needs remodelling by persevering efforts and education in depth. An extensive education in solidarity must be undertaken. The content of that education should be designed to bring home to every member of the population their close interdependence and the obligations arising therefrom. It is, for example, important that young and old realize how much they depend on each other, the young having need of the experience of the old, and even of their very presence, which is necessary to the equilibrium of every social group; the old receiving from the young both their material subsistence and especially the means of retaining longer their vitality. It is no less important for all workers to feel their community of interests with the sick, the disabled, the unemployed and all who are, against their will, unable to work due to economic and social circumstances. It is perhaps even more important for the sections of a population belonging to the various economic and socio-cultural strata to be aware of their interdependence and not to feel strangers to each other if they do not wish to run the risk of a brutal and painful awakening.

Such education should aim to reach all ages and consequently the methods should be adapted to the characters of each. For the younger generation it is, of course, the school which should fulfil the essential role. For adults and the elderly, education in solidarity should be one of the essentials of the type of permanent education

which is increasingly held to be an essential basis of the economic and social organization to come. Permanent education is no doubt first conceived of as technical and professional training to enable everyone to adapt to the ever-quickenings changes occurring in occupational activities due to technical and economic progress. But it is not limited to that. It goes further than the vocational preoccupations; it is intended to facilitate access to all degrees of culture for all people as well as to enable everybody to fill the place which is their due and to play the role incumbent on them in a perpetually changing society. Some of its essential aspects revolve around family, civic, economic and social training which should all convey an awareness of the modern world's realities, and therefore of the interdependence and solidarity of men.

Such education cannot be solely or even mainly instructional. It should make wide use of all modern media such as the press, radio and television. It should also express itself in a concrete manner by continually bringing together people of different social strata so as to teach them to know each other and to assess the need each has of the others. It should be the same thing in school where children and adolescents from all walks of life should mingle; and in towns and countryside which should be designed so as to avoid segregation and in such a manner as to bring together people of different material, social, cultural and occupational levels, as well as of different ages; in the organization of leisure, the same kinds of pastimes and amusements should be open to all, thus promoting meetings between people of all origins. The establishment of conscious solidarity is greatly facilitated by mutual awareness of the interdependent sections of the population. Education thus becomes spontaneous through the relationships promoted by that awareness and by such contacts.

Social workers have an outstanding role to play in this educational effort. They are indeed the privileged instrument of social solidarity. Finding themselves at the point where institutions, legislations, individuals and families meet, they can and should give to the institutions and the legislations their humane quality by regulating their application to particular situations. At the same time they are in a better position than any one else to explain to the legislature, the public authorities and various institutions the

needs which must be satisfied. It also falls to them, through the contacts they make, by the educational work which is essential to their mission, to overcome social barriers and to convey to all the sections of society with which they are in touch a sense of their mutual solidarity.

The cultivation of solidarity has of course a chance of success only if it is admitted that, to the fullest possible extent, men should have equal chances in life. There can be no hope of establishing conscious solidarity between men and families separated by strict stratifications imposing inequalities. It is difficult to feel any solidarity with someone for whom there is no recognition as an equal or at least as a potential equal. In other words, a necessary postulate of solidarity teaching is democracy, whether it be called a liberal, a socialist or a people's democracy.

Such education is in theory easier to set afoot in a socialist state because the political philosophy of that state is itself dependent on the pre-eminence of collective interests over individual interests, on the total responsibility of the society towards its members and on a ceaseless search for the effective equality of all members of society. It is not certain that the individuals do in fact feel greater solidarity among themselves, but the educational effort undertaken to achieve that aim is naturally part and parcel of the general training, at all events of the civic training, of the population.

The situation is different in the liberal democracies because of the opposition between an ideology centred on the individual and on competition, on the one hand, and the necessary affirmation of the solidarity of all members of the community on the other. It is therefore all the more necessary to stress, in the training of youth and adults, that solidarity which should absolutely balance individualistic tendencies and offset the excesses of man's natural selfishness.

Although it is sometimes difficult to create awareness of solidarity among all the members of a nation, the difficulty is considerably greater when it is desired to arouse and develop that awareness on an international scale. It is true that when great disasters and spectacular suffering occur there is a surge of world conscience. But these occasional and exceptional manifestations of

generosity are not enough. What is required is a permanent feeling of solidarity among men of all origins.

This is far from having been achieved. It is well known how difficult it is, even within a country, to avoid hostility to or at least mistrust of foreigners. Migrants, despite the considerable contribution they make to the economy of a country, are all too often unwelcome, or in any case arouse unfavourable reactions which may or may not be spontaneous. They are rejected, entrenched within a situation of occupational, moral and social inferiority. Differences of language, customs and culture, sometimes of religion and race, set up barriers which it is difficult to overcome. It is only by dint of persevering efforts by the authorities, workers' organizations and social workers that prejudice is attenuated and migrants gradually assimilated in the new economic and social contexts, by losing their own characteristics. Their admission into the community involves in most cases the loss of their individuality, as if conscious solidarity could not be established except between men and women who, at least psychologically and culturally, have similar characteristics.

Yet the world today demands such solidarity, not only among the various sections of a country, but also among the varied populations of many countries. Political and economic interdependence among nations must lead to conscious solidarity among the men and women who form those nations. That is the necessary condition for the establishment of adequate harmony among men. It is the prerequisite of social progress. It is necessary for peace. Yet that conscious solidarity does not exist. Scientists may demonstrate the fundamental identity of men wherever they may live. Moralists may insist that all men are brothers. The fact is: men are not brothers. That was of limited inconvenience when distance and infrequency of exchanges and communications were natural barriers between populations. But now that people are in ever-closer touch with each other, it is a serious danger.

The instillation of international solidarity seems to be every day more necessary; not so much among nations as among men of different nations. This demands that international institutions like UNESCO should not only develop a more accurate and a more complete knowledge of human realities throughout the world, but

also that they should promote the introduction of programmes into the training of youth and adults alike, designed to establish that reciprocal understanding and that awareness of interdependence which constitute the foundation of all solidarity. It is not a matter of eliminating differences, such as cultural differences, which may be and often are productive in themselves, but of ensuring that they are discerned and recognized as natural phenomena, to a great extent worthy of respect.

Of course some of these differences betoken inequalities in the level of economic and cultural development. To that extent, solidarity establishes the right of the under-privileged to receive assistance to reduce that inequality, and to initiate or to continue their efforts towards the improvement of their situation. Various international institutions and several economically advanced countries have been trying to do that for the last several decades. Their efforts have been limited and, far from shrinking, the economic differences tend to grow under the combined impact of the demographic explosion in the backward countries—which all too frequently completely absorbs the increased wealth resulting from the growth of production—and the expansion of domestic investments by the advanced countries, stimulating their ever-accelerating technological progress.

The very arrangements made to enable the advanced countries to provide assistance to the developing countries are sometimes detrimental to the efficiency of that aid. Because of their relative weakness, the populations of developing countries are, in their nature, particularly oversensitive to measures which, even involuntarily, underline their inferiority. For that reason, multilateral assistance provided through international organizations is preferable to bilateral solutions where the two countries involved are not equal to each other. The tendency so far has been the reverse. Every country offering aid to another seeks some economic, political or cultural counterpart. What is worse, even assistance from international bodies is organized by men of various nationalities who, even if their concern is unselfish, cannot help but react in terms of their own nationality, culture and political trends, and thus more or less favour those countries of which they are nationals. Assistance and technical co-operation are for that reason more or

less vaguely felt by the beneficiaries to be tainted with self interest, the more so as in the countries financing that aid or providing that co-operation the inhabitants often show little enthusiasm for the effort requested of them and for which they see no justification.

The explanation lies once again in the lack or inadequacy of those populations' conscious solidarity with those requiring assistance. They do not yet understand that nowadays everything which occurs in some part of the world has repercussions in other parts. The unequal distribution of demographic growth, the inequality of wealth, standards of living and opportunities for progress, and especially the all too frequent stress laid on that inequality, are all medium or long-term threats to the privileged populations today. Regardless of any moral consideration, it is in their own interest to draw the lessons to be learnt from the interdependence of contemporary economic and social systems.

But that result can be achieved only if, as well as governments and the elite, the mass of populations become genuinely and profoundly aware of this interdependence and feel their full solidarity. Once again, the key to the future is in the teaching of solidarity.

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