

II. Congress of the Humanist International

Message of the Organising Commission

Dear delegates to the Congress, observers and humanist friends.

In the name of the Organising Commission I would like to explain briefly our view of the tasks of this Congress in the face of the present moment in the life of the International, and the aspects that in our view require preferential attention.

As mentioned in the report by the presidency, the International has entered a new stage which represents new possibilities for influence and action on a world wide scale. For this purpose organic adaptations are required and the preparation of conditions which may allow us to give an affective response on this new scale of activity. This new stage is determined, by growing urgency, as a consequence of the historical changes of the past four years, to increase our presence and to give clear reference on an international scale.

The International can fulfil an important function generating wide scope ideological material capable of filling the void in political fronts in formation, and in others which although developed due to their concrete concerns of action are not in a position to generate such materials.

A compendium of ideological materials both practical and theoretical adequately disseminated could help, even in places without organised humanist activity to set these up, and to give a humanist orientation to already existing structures.

In addition the International can fulfil a role harmonising ideological positions on a regional level. It is not new the situation where within a region, a country or even amongst different humanist fronts, contradictory positions are held regarding the same issue, reducing the effectiveness of action. In that respect the International could fix positions and present wide scope recommendations, in order to overcome such deficiencies.

We can anticipate the International generating ideological material on a periodical basis and not just on a three yearly rhythm determined by our congresses.

This can be done by means of a specialised secretariat who could collect materials produced at a national level making them homogeneous widening their scope of application, and re-distributing them for wider use. Additionally the secretariat could establish a permanent centre for Humanist Studies for the purpose of particular studies both theoretical and practical. Preliminary consultations in that respect indicate a clear interest from our Russian friends and from the academy of Science, to initiate this activity in Moscow.

It is important as well to review the materials adopted by the International during the 1st Congress in Florence, examining their validity and opportunity in the present moment.

We must also consider areas of interest or themes on which it is urgent to take positions. It is clear that we will not be able to produce these during the short time of this congress, but we can well identify important areas and the fundamental issues within each of these.

A document fixing our position in the face of conflicts and problems of today's world can help as a general orientation and would be beneficial to give a clear signal about this congress.

A closer and more organic relationship is required with the national political fronts helping them to strengthen their action and accelerate their development.

There are many experiences within the more developed parties which go beyond the local and that are relevant in different political or social contexts as well. It would be possible to differentiate between what is strictly local and what has a general validity in these experiences. To use them could thus accelerate our development in different places. Perhaps we could also consider the movement of advisers with expertise in particular fields to help in setting up political action in new countries.

It is also important to encourage the development of humanist activities in places where these are not yet established. The experience of the Humanist Club of Moscow developed around contacts with the International, and without previous experience in setting up political structures, has shown in practice that this is possible. It must be observed in the later case the important support given by the Humanist Movement to its development.

We could conceive a role for the International as a mediator in conflicts between states, or between nations within a state, if the parties in conflict acknowledge the status of the International as an independent organisation.

There are contemporary precedents of effective mediations (as in the case of the Russell tribunal in the war between India and China), where an individual of an outstanding moral stature as it was the case with the philosopher Bertrand Russell, became for both parties a more credible arbiter than other international organisations.

It is possible to envisage a role for the International beyond its functions as a link among parties.

In parallel with the activities of national political fronts, the International could establish at a national level, relations with other organisations and political parties which could strengthen the action of the national political fronts. Indication of these is the presence of representatives from other parties as observers in this congress.

To develop all the above the International requires a regular publication, with a theoretical and practical content, information about its activities and summaries of the work carried by national parties. This publication could work in collaboration with national party publications, complementing each other. To this end attention must be given to content, language, frequency, distribution, finance, printing and editorial.

In relation to its organic work the experiences since 1989 seem to indicate that shorter lines of communication, compact functions, the possibility of fast decision making, the setting up of ad-hoc functions ceasing after achieving the required goal, are all linked to a greater effectiveness.

At this stage the topic of financial contributions by members must be also considered and the search, by the International, for resources sufficient to widen its activities.

Widening the levels of participation, opening the organisation to other parties, organisations, and in cases to individuals will increase the scope for influence by the International.

On these matters, among others, it would be useful to have at the end of the Congress sessions, concrete proposals of resolutions for the consideration of the plenary, so these can be the base for the implementation of the important changes required by the International at this stage.