

On Organizing Humanism

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DURING THIS CONGRESS we have been tackling all kinds of complex problems. We discussed present and future developments. These are indeed pertinent to the humanist role in the world. However, I want to speak of the part to be played by humanists in general. One of the unavoidable slogans that turn up at any congress is that people should not talk so much but should do things. The paradox of the slogan is that congresses are for talking. One might suggest a difference between talking for the sake of talking and talking for the sake of decision-making or action. But there is also a third kind of talking, one that is most important. That is, trying to clarify our conceptions and deepen our convictions. From that, a way to deciding and doing emerges.

Such an endeavour is not at all superfluous. Contrary to what we humanists are apt to assume, our concepts are very often far from clear and our convictions are more often than not rather commonplace. In addition humanists not seldom feel uncertain, not only with respect to truth—which may be an advantage—but also in respect to our own role—which can be a great disadvantage. For too many humanists the cock need not crow at all before they deny their conviction. It suffices that someone accuse them of lack of social commitment or solidarity with the oppressed and underprivileged people in the world, or whatever. Now let there be no misunderstanding about this. Humanists should be progressive and should

commit themselves to the cause of justice and freedom. But as humanists we are first and foremost involved in strengthening humane forces in man himself. This does not mean that we will not be involved in all kinds of progressive activities. But in our capacity as humanists we will have to contribute something special to all these activities. And that is a matter of creative conviction and clear concept.

It is often said that the underlying idea of social activities may be taken for granted. But then the questions of why and what for are not answered. And they must be answered in order to prevent derailment. Why do we want to help the developing areas share in an affluent economy that is severely criticized here? How do we think we can evoke and strengthen the forces that are needed for the establishment of human rights? What is the meaning of a renewal of society and democratic participation? Can something be done to prevent them from leading again to disappointment, partiality and authoritarianism? These strivings are partly rooted in social controversies and technical developments. But they are also influenced by the degree of self-awareness that man has attained. Here in particular the task of a humanist movement is to be found!

The central issue of humanist thinking is the quest for meaning. In the consciousness of creedal man, God is not only the creator of the world but also the guarantor of the meaning of life. He will arrange all things for the best, even if their meaning temporarily escapes us. But God is dead; that is what the so-called negative theology itself proclaims. Is there any longer a meaning to be discovered in life? This is the sense of Nietzsche's cry of distress, 'God is dead!' Is there still an above and a beneath? He adds, 'Who will fill up this sea (of despair)?' Sometimes it seems as if not until in our time has this word of Nietzsche's been really understood. It has become the crucial issue of our time. For man needs meaning, not only to fulfil his social role in a creative way, but also to withstand the contingency of life. However, meaning—for

humanists—cannot be conceived of as an ultimate rationality of the universe. It must be given to life by man himself by the way he lives it. Can humanists help men in the search for meaning, that is, in the search for a satisfying way of living? Naturally it depends in part on personal preference and choice. Nevertheless given the similarity of all human beings a humanist model of human living may be of some use in solving the problem.

At any rate our answer must apply to modern man in a modern setting. That is more and more a setting in which society is dominated by technology and organization. These make man feel alienated and solitarized (by which latter word I allude to something much more technical and fatal than solitude). But if alienation and solitarization are fundamental evils in our pattern of living, then the humanist reply to them is self-determination and solidarity. These are words like other words. But what do they mean in this context? Their social meaning is clear: they mean personal participation, independence of judgment and responsible citizenship; and on the other hand social commitment, respect for others, and the will to mutual understanding. The social context is important, for no lasting solutions for the problems of mankind can be achieved if they are not supported by a radical change of social patterns.

As important from the point of view of a humanist movement are the implications for personal life. Self-determination means realization of one's capacities in a spirit of self-confidence and courage, tracing one's proper way together with others. Thus in realizing his personality man realizes humanity as fellowship. There is no possible realization of one's self that is not directed toward others. Self-determination and fellowship are indissoluble concepts. Together they make life worthwhile; not as an abstract formula but as a concrete experience. And it is the foremost challenge to a humanist movement to furnish an image of such a life that is worth living. Such an image cannot be given as a ready-made recipe, but it can be

developed, and that should be the point of humanist activities. That process should be going on in our counselling and moral education, in our discussion groups and community activities, in our publications and our statements. And it should be kept in mind in our dialogues and our efforts to influence social and cultural developments.

In this connection the question arises of what can be done in education (both for children and adults) for the promotion of complete men and women, people who can creatively realize themselves in their work and their leisure time, people who can playfully express themselves in their language and behaviour, and who can satisfactorily cooperate and live with others? What can be done in the personal sphere and in family life to further self-realization and the fellowship, to strengthen both self-confidence and interhuman relations? But the question also must be asked what can be done in factories and offices, in public service, schools and universities and in society at large to preserve and restore authentic humanity? For human living means living in community; human achievement depends on social culture. Conversely society is bound to furnish the conditions for the welfare of its members. And this equally applies to world society. Hence the humanist commitment to the cause of the developing areas, world order and world peace.

So we have returned from the personal sphere to the social environment. What I want to stress is that humanists have a particular function, but that is not to compete with more or less radical movements. Humanists ought not forsake them. On the contrary, humanists must have solidarity with them. But our proper contribution is the defence of human values, both toward establishments or bureaucracies and toward progressiveness and radicalism. It is not at all 'academic' or 'utopian' to emphasize that there are important human values that furnish the only justification for the reconstruction of society. Not so much as distant ends but rather as immediate means. No future utopia is valid that is not realized in present action.

Therefore it is up to us to promote cooperation and understanding, mutual respect and openness, trust and non-violence.

There are such terrible developments going on nowadays, that it often seems impossible to preserve human values in the thick of the fight. The worst thing humanists could do would be to behave like pedants in ivory towers. Nevertheless, if we don't make our point by maintaining human values wherever they are threatened, then we truly make ourselves superfluous; would-be politicians or substitute radicals. Humanist radicalism consists of radical humanity, both in the social context and in personal life. For—I repeat—one cannot think of true and lasting social activities in a humanist sense that are not rooted in the awareness of meaning in one's own existence. This approach is full of threat and frustration, distrust and evil, sorrow and death. But there are also the possibilities of joy and happiness, loyalty and friendship, fulfilment and hope. Humanists are challenged to realize these possibilities in their personal relations. This is at the same time the only hope for mankind.

Am I speaking of the aims and purposes of the IHEU? *I am!* The IHEU is not a magic power above and apart from our daily lives. What the IHEU is depends upon what the national organizations are; and what they are depends on what their local branches can achieve; and their achievements depend on the humanism of individual humanists. We are not many in the world. But there are many more than the numbers we count if we take into account those who sympathize with the humanist idea in the Marxist countries and the third world. Our strength depends on the authenticity of our ideas. The IHEU can be their instrument too. Looking from the other side, the IHEU can try and inspire its member organizations by the ideas I have been exploring. It can do that in its conferences and meetings, by the exchange of conceptions that it makes possible, and by the continual dialogues that it promotes, both with various types of humanists and with non-

humanists. Not the least, by expressing the humanist position in the world.

The policy of the IHEU is the continuing effort of gathering the scattered elements of humanism and strengthening their influence. It gives stature to the idea of humanism in the international community, so that humanism gets a face of its own, and hands to realize its aims. Much remains to be done. What have we contributed to the practice of personal life, to education, to sexual freedom, to labour reform, and to a modern conception of social relations, human rights, development cooperation and peace? I am thinking of a really original, creative contribution that would open new perspectives and hope for all people. It can be done if we succeed in mobilizing the intellectual and moral forces around the world. It can be done if we are aware of the fact that humanism attempts to provide a coherent answer to the questions of human life, and that it assumes that human existence can be made worthwhile by the realization of everyone's possibilities in devotion to a common humanity.

Really, world humanism has a great part to play. And it can do it. *If you will!*