Pierre A. ZUMBACH

Head of the Social Welfare Section

Pierre Zumbach was born in Geneva in August 1930 and, even if his name has a Germanic ring about it, comes from an old-established Geneva family. It was his great-grandfather who first settled in the city, attracted from his home in the Bernese fore-Alps by Lake Geneva and the developing watch-making industry.

After completing his secondary and university studies in Geneva, Pierre Zumbach was awarded a degree in social and economic sciences in 1952. While still studying, he had shown an ever-growing interest in educational and social problems, and as a student had taken an active part in various youth movements. Then, during a visit to Yugoslavia, he learnt of his appointment as Director of a welfare office founded 20 years before by protestant circles in Geneva. Given the task of re-organizing this institution, he transformed it into a welfare centre providing such services as legal and social advice, an employment bureau, an accommodation bureau, and liaison between various welfare institutions. He also helped to found new holiday camps and a home-help service.

Right from the beginning, close contact was established with the official bodies responsible for social and educational problems. This led the way to Pierre Zumbach’s appointment, at the end of 1955, as ‘tuteur général’ for the canton of Geneva, a post which he held for eight years. As part of his duties he carried out numerous surveys and missions abroad — in Belgium, France and the U.S.S.R.; then in Cameroun, on behalf of the United Nations; finally, for the Swiss service of technical co-operation, in Algeria and again, at the beginning of this year, in Cameroun.

As ‘tuteur général’ he devoted himself to re-organizing the official service for the protection of children, applying with good effect the results of comparative studies in other parts of Europe. In 1962 he published a book on the theme ‘Parents of to-day’ (Parents d’aujourd’hui, Éditions de la Baconnière), which set out some practical considerations of current educational ideas and gave a lead for the formation of parents’ associations. In passing, it should be added that Pierre Zumbach also found time to marry and now has three children.

Already in 1961, sent by the Geneva authorities to Toronto, Canada, for a period of study to complete his doctoral thesis, he had found himself more and more interested in the problems of community life. In another context, he had always considered that the life of Geneva was seriously threatened if the large proportion of foreigners living there contributed only to its economic prosperity. He is convinced that foreign residents, whether temporary or permanent, have much to offer to the cultural and social life of Geneva and that Geneva will not be able to survive and prosper without increasing its efforts to welcome and maintain close ties with them, adopting more readily this role of a clearing house for human relations in the centre of Europe.

So it was that Pierre Zumbach came into contact with CERN and became interested in the post of Head of the Social Welfare Service, formed to provide the greater attention, new approach and modern methods necessary in matters of social welfare by the rapid increase in the Organization’s staff.

Dr. Zumbach took up his duties on 17 February. He has given himself three or four months to become familiar with CERN, after which he intends to draw up a detailed list of matters he considers in need of attention. At the moment, he sees two main classes of problems:

1. Individual and family problems

He wishes to make it clear that the Welfare Service, which is part of the new section, is available to all. Every guarantee is given that the problems dealt with will be treated in the strictest confidence. The Welfare Officer, Mrs. L. Favre, looks after the enquiries, under Dr. Zumbach’s supervision. The types of problem that arise will show in what way the service might be improved, but it seems that the need for home helps is becoming very acute in many CERN families.

What steps could be taken to help mothers who are overloaded? Could a mutual-aid service be developed inside CERN? Or must professional services be used?

2. Problems of interest to the whole CERN community

Both within the Organization (welfare services) and in its external relations (contacts with the communities of Geneva and the neighbouring regions in France), Pierre Zumbach feels, subject to a more thorough study, that the wives of staff members could play a very useful part in inducing CERN people to take a keener interest in certain social activities in Geneva.

The Social Welfare Section is attached to the Personnel Division. Pierre Zumbach hopes also to work in close co-operation with the Staff Association, its president and its committee, especially the member responsible for welfare matters. He is in a position to study current problems from a practical point of view. He is also greatly interested in the efforts of the Residents’ Association of the Satellite Town at Meyrin, which he considers one of the promising experiments in developing community life in Geneva. He is anxious that the section under his charge should become an information centre for welfare, scholastic and educational matters. For that reason he wishes to maintain close contacts with all the official and private bodies in Geneva and the Pays de Gex.

Pierre Zumbach has remarked on the interest shown in social questions by a large number of people in CERN, but he has a feeling that this interest could be more effective if it were more co-ordinated. This is why he hopes to benefit from the opinions, remarks and experience of all those who are willing to offer information and, all being well, to promote with his new section a more lasting collaboration. As he says, ‘the results to be obtained in the future do not depend on magic formulae (and even less on the efforts of a single person), but much more simply on team work, tackling the problems realistically and forcefully.’

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