



INTERNATIONAL GATHERING OF RURAL YOUTH

VIENNE 9th TO 15th DECEMBER 1954

INTERNATIONAL GATHERING OF RURAL YOUTH

**Edited by the International Preparatory Committee
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INTRODUCTION

The International Gathering of Rural Youth was held in Vienna from 9th to 15th December, 1954.

A year before, when the young peasants of the small Italian village of San Alberto de Ravenna launched this initiative one could believe that such a thing was not easy to realise. Indeed, it was a tremendous task to mobilise millions of young rural people, to bring them into action for the defence of their rights, to obtain the means so that their representatives could meet together in Vienna. Such an event had no precedent; it was the first of its kind in the history of the youth movement. But the rural youth of the world knew how to find the force and the means to achieve this immense task. They have carried it out with great success.

This magnificent Gathering was preceded by 21 national conferences and gatherings, by more than 850 regional conferences and gatherings, and by thousands and thousands of assemblies and conferences for the different categories of rural youth, by enquiries on the living conditions of the rural youth, fêtes, sports competitions and cultural contests.

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At the International Gathering of Rural Youth 356 delegates and guests from 69 countries participated, representing the various sections of the youth of the countryside. Among the participants there were 164 peasants, agricultural workers, farmers, share-croppers, etc., appointed by their work-mates, 62 leaders of youth, trade union and social organisations of the countryside, 28 teachers, agronomists, agricultural engineers, 9 parliamentary people, etc... There were also 31 industrial workers, as well as students, youth leaders, etc... 46 of the participants were young girls coming from the countryside from all corners of the world.

Among the delegates one could notice, among others, Sing Bahadur, deputy of the Indian parliament and leader of the "All-India Scheduled Caste Federation", and Zdravka Kovacheva, daughter of an agricultural worker, herself a young peasant and deputy in the Bulgarian parliament; Alfred Negre, president of the Agricultural Co-operatives of Gard, in France, and Ann Ryga, young leader of a women's section of the farmers' trade union of Canada; Bruno Bernini, president of the World Federation of Democratic Youth; Pango Fabien, agricultural worker, leader of the African Youth League of the Ivory Coast and Alexandre Vartchak, president of a Ukrainian kolkhoz.

Numerous messages reached us from different groups of rural youth, from Peasant Trade Union Organisations. We quote some of the youth from the region of the Cocoa plantations of Buerarema Itabuna (Brazil), from Lombardo Toledano, from the Workers' Confederation of Latin America, from the United Packing-house Workers of America, Chicago (USA), from the Youth League of Burma, from the Youth of Ravenna; various messages arrived from Finland, Hungary, India, Germany, France, and elsewhere.

Heated debates animated the seven days of the proceedings of the Gathering. Sixty-four speakers took part in the discussion in the plenary sessions, while 140 intervened in a serious and searching discussion in six working commissions.

A part of these seven days was devoted to friendly gatherings between delegations. There were gatherings of every kind, from country to country for the exchanges of experiences as between Italy and Japan, for friendship and better reciprocal understanding as between the USSR and France, China and the Latin American countries, Vietnam and Black Africa, etc... There were gatherings of a more specific nature such as those of students and technicians. The most important initiative, in this respect was without doubt the gathering of young people from European countries, as a result of which they adopted a declaration in which it was said especially: "Hear us young men and women of the countryside. Hear us young people of Europe and of the whole world! It is only by the common efforts of all the youth, alongside all men fighting for peace, that we will be able to

stop the rebirth of West German militarism and ensure peace in Europe and throughout the world."

All these gatherings have helped the representatives of the rural youth of the world to get to know each other better and have established relations which will be strengthened in the future.

Before concluding its proceedings, the Gathering unanimously adopted an Appeal to the rural youth of the world, a World Charter of fundamental demands of the rural youth and an appeal to all international organisations.

We publish in this collection extracts of the report and interventions in the discussion, as well as the documents arising from the Gathering, of first importance for the future activity of the world in fighting for the defence of its rights.

In the evenings, the delegates met again in order to attend the films brought by different delegations. They met the Austrian youth during a friendly social with a cultural and dance programme.

And during the evening given by the WFDY delegation everyone could see a demonstration of the friendship which united the youth of all countries and which was strengthened there by the distribution of contributions to the "International Solidarity Fund" set up by this organisation in order to bring help and solidarity to the youth of 33 colonial and underdeveloped countries.

These different evenings have contributed to the coming together of all the delegates and guests.

**THE SITUATION AND DEMANDS OF THE
YOUTH OF THE COUNTRYSIDE
FOR A BETTER LIFE**

Extracts from the report of Mr.-Franco CONCAS, Italian M. P.

In the past there has never been such an initiative prepared and carried through not only with a few leaders and a few countries, but also with all rural youth throughout the world.

Responding to the Appeal of our Preparatory Committee, together with the youth of all countries, we have prepared for this Gathering by a large variety of activities, and events, in the service of all young rural people. Twenty-one national conferences and gatherings were organised, more than 850 regional gatherings and tens of thousands of rallies and conferences of all sections of young people and villages; joint initiatives, enquiries on the living conditions of rural youth, campaigns, festivals, sport contests and competitions of cultural interest.

During these rich and varied activities, everywhere the rural youth have drawn up their basic demands: for guaranteed employment, for land, for wage increases, for reducing taxes, for social assistance, housing, civilisation of the countryside, freedom, national independence and peace. Everywhere great successes have been achieved.

Today, representatives who have come from more than 60 different countries, belonging to all rural and youth categories, with the most varied opinions and beliefs, we are happy to be together and to be able to get personally acquainted.

We shall discuss our problems; in a more lively way, we shall exchange our experiences and freely give voice to our opinions. We are united by the same great will: the achievement of a better life. Together we shall establish the path to follow for the satisfaction of our just aspirations.

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Our rural life remains in general at a backward level. What is even worse, it is often aggravated, in contrast to our epoch in which there are such great natural resources and where the application of modern science and technology would permit a forward leap which our fathers could not even imagine.

It is true that the conditions of the young people greatly vary from one country to another; even in a single country the conditions differ from region to region.

Nevertheless, there is a common trait which is characteristic of our conditions, which is confirmed even by official data and publications: it is the lamentable backwardness of the countryside in all spheres of development, economic, social, cultural and political.

Thousands of young people in the countryside are unemployed. In Indonesia, for example, according to the official publications of the State, the number of unemployed or part-time agricultural workers is ten million, five million of whom are young. In Argentina, the young peasants work but three or four months per year, as in Spain and many other countries.

Frequently these young people are employed without any contract whatsoever and sometimes their salary is even insufficient for their food. These young people are doomed to a life of misery, of roaming with neither aid nor assistance, and conditions in many other countries are similar.

Let us consider another important problem: the problem of land. For millions of young people land remains an inaccessible dream and often they are driven from their property.

In Brazil our National Committee has written to us that more than ten million peasants are landless. In Punjab in India, 100,000 peasants were forced to leave the land in the past few months.

Millions of small landowners who live off their work, are systematically ruined by debts.

Another serious problem for rural youth is the problem of the lowering of payment for his labour. Thus in India the wages of agricultural workers vary from one rupee to one and a half rupees daily whereas the minimum cost of two meals is one and a half rupees.

Rural youth can get little education which often accounts for the larger number of illiterates. In South Africa, for example, according to official data, only 9.7% of children can go to school.

In Iran in the region of Varanin, there is only one school per 37 villages. In Greece, according to figures issued by the Ministry of Public Education, 45% of the population are illiterate as against 37% before the war. The conditions of girls are particularly difficult. They are doubly exploited, as young people and as women. After a day in the fields they must do their housework, and they get the lowest salaries.

Backwardness is also a typical feature of the countryside. Very often, even in the developed countries, people live as they did centuries ago, without roads, electricity, machines, sanitary facilities, or liberties for all those residing in the village.

The young people of Cesset (Allier) in France, for example, write us: "The road leading to our village is only an old abandoned one; there is no telephone, no physician or veterinary, surgeon, no light even in the main street, each drop of water to wash in, is counted; and for amusement, one must travel 8 kilometres."

Furthermore, rural youth in many countries are denied the most elementary rights and liberties. There is no other strata of the population so deprived of the opportunity to express their opinions and demands, to organise, to participate in social and political life. In Salvador, for instance, there is an article in the Constitution, which forbids the peasants to organise. And when these rights are theoretically recognised, there are few means to actually practice them. Such is the case in Brazil, where the right to vote is recognised for people above 18 years of age, but where illiterates cannot vote. And in Brazil almost no young peasant can read.

Therefore, from one country to another, the causes for the privations of rural youth are varied. But there is no doubt that this situation — as has been unanimously recognised by all national and local preparatory committees, and especially by the youth of all countries — is aggravated by the will of certain powers to prepare a new war, to develop international tension, to prevent mutual security and the establishment of friendly relations and fruitful exchange, to alienate the people's right to freedom, recognised and proclaimed by the United Nations Charter.

For all our work, for crops to grow, for cattle to fatten, for the village to know a happy life, we must have peace. This is equally true everywhere, North and South, East and West. We also need national independence, freedom for everyone to be master in his own home — that eternal will of the peasants which a tradition of glorious struggle has brought to us through centuries of history in which we take pride.

But peace does not only mean that life continues, it is growth, the forward march to happiness.

War preparations are invading all walks of life. Taxes and levies are increasing and so is their burden on all of us, placing the goods we need out of our reach, and simultaneously, in the cities, impoverishing the common people and lowering their power to purchase our products.

Our products find difficulties in their way to international markets and crisis in agriculture is further aggravated.

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What are in our opinion the principal lessons we may draw from the preparations for our International Gathering?

What seems to us very important is the realisation, stronger today than at any previous time, that it is possible to change our situation. Our confidence in the successful fulfillment of our just demands has been reinforced. We believe that this is the most important feature of all our experiences in preparing for this Gathering.

The successes which we obtained during this period are great. Everywhere and in every walk of life, whether for our economic and social demands or in the development of our activities, we can say with satisfaction that progress has been made. Allow me, on behalf of the International Preparatory Committee, to cite but a few examples:

More than 90,000 young agricultural workers in the Padana Valley in Italy have, through struggle, obtained an annual wage increase amounting to 634 million lira. In the few years the young share-croppers in 12 provinces have obtained holiday pay amounting to almost 30 million lira... Nearly 10,000 young boys and girls obtained an average of 3000 lira each during the summer.

Thousands of unemployed youth obtained jobs uniting their efforts to those of the share-croppers to insist that work for the improvement of the land be carried out. In this way, at Pisticci, a small village in Italy's south, 300 unemployed youth received jobs in the "Organisation for Agrarian Reform".

In the past few months, in the field of professional education the opening of 101 professional schools was achieved; in the field of sports, 22 sports grounds were constructed.

These successes differ from one country to another: big or small they are equally important, for they show that it is possible to change things in our villages, to have our demands satisfied, to improve our living standard, even in the hardest and most difficult conditions.

Therefore the means by which we achieved our successes have been varied and numerous. Nevertheless, in this variety of forms and methods there is a common trait, a common feature which unites them all: our initiative, the creative activity, the incessant action and struggle of rural youth and their organisations. Briefly, we have learned that "nothing falls from heaven", and that "if you do not sow and if you do not work, you have no harvest" as the proverbs say.

It depends upon our work, upon the struggle of all rural youth to win opportunities to change their lives. Yes, it is not enough to

have good ideas and to draw up demands, we must work to impose them! This is the second big lesson we have learned from the experiences of the preparations for our Gathering.

Where was the greatest success achieved? Where do we find the most varied initiatives, the most activity — the broadest both in great and in small problems? It is clear that we have such successes where unity was strongest among all rural youth and their organisations.

Once more we would like to mention Japan as an example. In Japan, the activities of rural youth have reached unprecedented proportions. It is because most complete unity was achieved locally, it is because the most varied organisations have worked together to achieve the unity of all young people to demand that their own needs be satisfied. Our friends in Japan told us: "Conditions in our country differ from one district to another, the views we hold on the causes of our painful situation also vary, but nothing prevents us from uniting to demand the solution of these problems, nothing has prevented each organisation from doing its best to develop the greatest possible number of rural youth activities. This is why successes were greater." We can see a similar unity of all sections of rural youth in many other countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Indonesia, Iran, Finland, Germany, Austria, with local and national examples. This is another great indication coming after all these months of joint work in preparation for our Gathering, that unity is the key to all our successes.

Unity is possible because our problems are common to us all. We belong to different sections: agricultural workers, share-croppers, small landowners, tenants agricultural technicians, craftsmen, young men and women. We all want life in our villages to become more beautiful. According to the sections to which we belong we have different demands. But they do not divide us; on the contrary, they help us to reach our common goals together.

Experience has shown us that this unity is possible. On the other hand, the facts, life in our villages, prove that it is necessary; for united we will be stronger, united we shall be able to engage confidently in the hardest of struggles.

Determined to overcome the scattering of their forces, rural youth have created various organisations, in order to defend and improve their conditions, and have strengthened existing ones. The young people are interested and in some countries such as Ecuador, together with the Federation of Agricultural Workers, they have played an active part in trade union life, in the coopera-

tives and the existing peasant organisations, frequently setting up their own action committees.

Everybody realises the importance of this. Young people in the countryside are scattered and often disorganised.

The strengthening of organisations has helped establish relations between village and village, region and region, as well as on a national scale; giving a new breadth to the activities, it has made all rural youth movements stronger and permanent. This is why the young people in the countryside expect much from organisations. They can do a great deal for us. This is yet another lesson which we may draw from the preparations for our Gathering: organisation is necessary to make our activities more effective, for it multiplies our efforts. It guarantees ever-growing and more powerful unity and action.

First of all, young workers, employees, students and all young men and women in the cities are also united with us. They understand that, sons of the same homeland, we are linked by a common desire to make it free and prosperous; they understand that crisis and poverty in the countryside have the same causes as their own troubles, and how the difficulties of the one affect the other. They realise that progress in the countryside means a higher living standard for all, it is employment in industry, jobs for the students after graduation, and less expensive agricultural products. The young people of the cities realise the importance of standing shoulder to shoulder with rural youth and of helping them as much as they can in their struggle for a better life.

We would like to recall here the fraternal solidarity of the young workers and students and of all young people in the cities of Brazil, Argentina, India, Indonesia, and many other countries. Activities in this field were also varied. In some countries, such as Italy, in Milan, Florence, campaigns and struggles were organised for the demands of rural youth. In other countries, to support the rural youth in their activities and to help them to organise a better life, visits to the countryside were organised.

Fraternal solidarity between rural youth and youth in the cities, which had never before been expressed so fully, has strengthened, and is further strengthening the bonds of friendship and unity among all young people.

Our struggles of rural youth do not separate us from those that are waged by the whole rural population: no less than we, our elders do not resign themselves to conditions of crisis and decadence, typical of agriculture in a number of countries. Like us, they want the possibility to work for a better life and for peace.

The peasant movement has never been so united, broad, and large. We have always considered it a duty of honour to be in the front ranks of the great activities demanding emancipation and progress, in which all people of the countryside are interested, irrespective of age.

We have felt that beyond our small village and our country, there are everywhere young people who live like us, who have the same hopes and who, like us, have decided to realise them. We feel that we are all members of a greater family.

During the preparation for our Gathering we have multiplied the exchange of correspondence and experiences among young people, among organisations in different countries, thus enlarging our horizon; we have exchanged many delegations between countries; our international solidarity has been reinforced, and friendly ties have become deeper and indestructible.

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Thus, these few lessons which we have begun to draw from the enormous activities developed during these months testify to the efficiency of our work.

But we all see, don't we, that this is but the beginning, but an indication of what it is possible to do.

On the basis of the draft for a Charter of the fundamental demands of youth in the countryside, adopted by the Preparatory Committee at its session in Denmark, the rural youth of all countries, on farms, plantations, cascinas, ranches and villages in Asia, America, Australia, Europe and Africa have drawn up their demands, in preparing for our Gathering.

It is because of those common aspiration of all rural youth, irrespective of their opinions and religious beliefs, that we are called upon here, at our Gathering, to establish the fundamental demands of all rural youth, men and women, of the world, in a World Charter.

The Charter will be completed by some local demands according to the situation in the various countries. It will help the rural youth draw up their demands on each farm, cascina, plantation, ranch and village; both on a local and national scale; demands around which all rural youth are ready to unite and work together to achieve satisfaction, demanding them from public servants, local authorities, members of parliament, elected officials, public opinion, etc. Thousands of examples in the preparation for the Gathering show boundless possibilities to obtain very important and immediate results.

On the basis of our common experiences, our task after this Gathering will be to continue and expand the work already begun in our countries in ways most suitable to the different situations: organisation of meetings, rallies, conferences, gatherings, both on the local and national scale, of various categories and of all youth, organisation of relay races, enquiries, cultural and sport gatherings and demonstrations. All these in order to take the Charter and the results of our Gathering everywhere and discuss them. We must undertake new activities, take new initiatives which will unite the young people for the achievement of their vital demands.

During our campaign for the application of the demands of our Charter, we could, for example, request all local and national organisations to speak up and to help us in our work: — we could ask the youth organisations, and trade union and peasant organisations as well, to support our demands, to create their own commissions for the development of rural youth work,

— we could ask the most varied social, cultural and sports organisations, and all those who take an interest in recreation in the countryside, for example, to support our campaigns against disease and illiteracy, in defence of health, for education and culture; we could ask them to back us in the organisation of our cultural and artistic programmes and contests, and in our sports competitions, etc...

— we could ask the organisations in the cities to acquaint all young people with our difficulties, and our problems, and to call upon them to develop their solidarity with us; we could ask them to continue and strengthen their help to the youth of the countryside through visits by groups of students, young workers and young people in general from the cities to the countryside, etc.

We have organised this International Gathering of all rural youth.

Why, for instance, in order to study our common problems in even greater detail, should we not organise meetings or conferences, either on general topics linked with the life of the youth of this or that region, or on specific subjects? Gatherings could be organised with the aid of youth in the cities to rural youth; on the lives of young agricultural workers or small landowners; on the development of technical education, etc.

In order to strengthen our work and our friendship, we could broaden international exchanges of correspondence and experiences, of delegations; we could stimulate the constitution of committees of cooperation and friendship between rural youth and organisations from two or three countries which have almost the same