

## **The International Federation of Settlements (IFS)**

### The constitution of an international social movement

The Settlements which were created from 1884 onwards, first of all in the Anglo-Saxon world, were not straightaway established in federations. In the beginning, they were singular creations taking ideas from one another in a haphazard way.

#### ***Toynbee Hall sets the standard***

The creation of Toynbee Hall in 1884 in Whitechapel, a working-class district, by the Anglican vicar Samuel Barnett, gave no inkling of the fruitful future that this singular experience of social fraternity and popular education would have. Its particularity comes from its wishing to be a « settlement », that is to say **a place where persons come from outside a district and from another social background to live there long-term** in order to establish relationship of cooperation rather than patronage with the local population. In fact, the « Residents » of Toynbee Hall are mainly students from the London Universities who, with their working-class neighbours, undertake mutually assisted educational programmes.

It so happened that this new form of social action is adopted in England, in the United States, in France and in other countries. In effect, visitors, wishing to acquaint themselves with these new methods which run counter to the habitual methods of treating poverty, come to live on the spot, take part in activities and discover their principles. On their return, some of them attempt to put into practice where they live what they have seen.

Thus, **Jane Addams**, a twenty-seven-year-old American, daughter of a Quaker senator stays at Toynbee Hall in 1887. She returns there the following two years and with a friend undertakes, in turn, the founding of a Settlement in Chicago in 1889, named « Hull House » which will also set a precedent.

French men and women also enjoy stays at Toynbee Hall. The result will be **three attempts at implementing Settlements in France.**

The first one is undertaken by a young banker, **Max Lazard**. While being a financial trainee in a London bank he resides for a while at Toynbee Hall in 1896. Convinced of the pertinence of minister Barnett's work, on returning to Paris in 1897 he takes up lodgings at Ménilmontant, one the most populated and poorest districts of Paris to carry out « social and educational activities ». This too personal attempt will be short. Max Lazard will then get involved in « People's Universities » which will also prove to be ephemeral since too elitist and often politicised.

The second attempt at implementation in France will last several years but have no follow-up. It was led in Paris by **Jacques Bardoux**, future barrister and academician, under the name of « **Fondation universitaire de Belleville** » (“**University Foundation of Belleville**”). When he is a student at Oxford in 1895, he discovers Toynbee Hall and goes there. On his return to France he opens, with student friends a « University Settlement » in 1899 in the district of Belleville in Paris. « It includes a library and various study groups. To the neighbouring workers and employees, as well as to students, it offers conferences, dramatic productions and evening events. Schoolchildren are invited on Thursdays when they can take part in various classes and games»<sup>1</sup>. This attempt in

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Apolline de Gourlet, *Colonies sociales. La résidence laïque dans les quartiers populaires*, L'Action populaire, n° 37, mai 1904, p. 14.

popular education in the settlement form comes to an end in 1906. « In effect the French students are reluctant to live alongside the workers. The active and progressive collaboration of the worker members with the internal administration of the Foundation, anticipated in the statutes never took place» <sup>2</sup>

By contrast, the third attempt will have a long-term future and will be the source of the development of social centres in France. This is what **Marie Gahéry** undertakes in Paris with the help of the Marquis Costa de Beauregard. It will take the name of “**Social Work of Popincourt**” (« **Œuvre Sociale de Popincourt** ») in 1897. With Mercédès Le Fer de la Motte, this work will give birth to the « Social Houses » (« Maisons Sociales ») and then, with Marie-Jeanne Bassot, on to the « Social Residences » (« Résidences Sociales »), notably that of Levallois Perret in the Parisian suburbs, which will become emblematic for the French Social Centres.

**In Holland**, a Settlement, named « Ons Huis, » is established in 1892 in Amsterdam. In 1952 it will host the 6th Conference of the « International Federation of Settlements » (IFS).

**In Germany**, the first Settlement is created in 1911 by Professor Siegmund Schultze who has come to live in East Berlin with his family. It is in one of these settlements that the 3rd IFS Conference is held in 1932.

### *The slow federalisation of the Settlements*

The increase in numbers of Settlements in a country does not automatically generate their national federalisation.

Thus, **in Great Britain**, the created Settlements differ from one another according to whether they are initiated and perpetuated by the Universities, by the Churches or by women. This diversity will give rise to two distinct federations. The main one, the « British Association of Settlements », is formed in **1920**. It will have 42 members by 1926.

**In the United States** the number of Settlements grows rapidly. There are already 74 Settlements by 1897. By 1910, they number more than 300, but still without a federal structure. Having understood that their action on a district scale could not change the social conditions of the working-class and that it was necessary to work at town, state and national scales, the Settlements, with Hull House and Jane Addams at the head constitute their national federation **in 1911**, some 25 years after opening the first American Settlement in New York in 1886.

There are countries such as **Canada**, where, in 1949, the Settlements are not yet federated nationally, but nevertheless have relations with the IFS.

**In France**, federalisation only took place **in 1922**. It was conducted principally by **Marie-Jeanne Bassot**, the charismatic general secretary of the Social Residence of Levallois-Perret. On a study-visit to the United States in 1919, she visits a number of Settlements and meets federal leaders. She becomes aware of the power to transform social situation that the American federated Settlements possess. She returns to France determined to « think big » and undertakes the regrouping of those Social Works that do not necessarily know one another and who were not created in filiation to the « Mother House » of Toynbee Hall. These dozen Works take on common definition and denomination, that of a Social Centre, and can thus constitute a French delegation to participate in the Settlements’ 1<sup>st</sup> international Conference held at Toynbee Hall in July 1922.

### *The international ambitions of the IFS*

**In 1926**, in Paris, the French federation, despite its inexperience, hosts the Settlements’ 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference, and its 500 delegates from 14 countries who are there to discuss the theme : « The Settlements’ methods for promoting social reconciliation ». It is during this Conference that **the creation of an international federation of Settlements is decided upon**, so great is the conviction that the mode of

operation of the Settlements may reduce social divisions and render societies cooperative, and that it must be generalised. The moment is favourable for optimism, as evidenced by this commentary: « Since so much work had already been carried out, since so many generous willing persons had been ready to cooperate, was it not the moment to believe that the friendships of the Settlement, going beyond the neighbourhood boundaries, would multiply in all directions and in all regions, in the factories and in the cities, from political party to political party, as from nation to nation ? »<sup>3</sup>. In any case, it was down to the IFS to serve this ambition as Ms Knappert<sup>4</sup> expressed during the closing session of the 1926 Conference : « We hope that the new association will be a powerful factor **for the improvement and stabilisation in international relations.** »<sup>5</sup>.

The IFS, thus armed with its utopia, that of cooperative fraternity, and a principle of action having shown its worth, that of “Résidence”, sets a **Permanent Secretariat charged with three main missions** :

- ° Firstly, **to promote relationship and exchanges** between the national federations and their Settlements
  - ° Then, **to promote the pattern of “global social action” of the Settlements** when specialised Social Services begin to develop under the aegis of public or employer’s organisations which can hardly escape from paternalistic logistics. This, for example, is what Marie-Jeanne Bassot does during the 1st International Conference of Social Services which takes place in Paris in 1928. There she contests the report presented by Juliette Delagrang, superintendent and director at the Ministry of public health, who supports the pertinence of the organisation of the workers’ leisure activities by their bosses aided by factory superintendents. She proposes instead the practices of the Settlements which allow the workers to escape from this dependence and discover leisure activities the organisation of which they can contribute to.
- After having described what was taking place in the American Settlements, she concluded her account with this affirmative phrase: « I repeat then that, for me, the formula of the Settlements is the only productive one, the ideal formula since it involves the cooperation of everybody. »<sup>6</sup>
- ° Finally, it is down to the Permanent Secretariat to take all the necessary measures to **push forward the social reforms** for which the Settlements work »<sup>7</sup>

If the Federations, members of the international federation, are happy to underline their convergence on the Settlements’ project, **nevertheless strategic divergences appear**. These come to the surface, for example, during the preparation of the international Conference of 1936. The Secretariat of the IFS proposes « democracy » as the theme for the Conference. The French Federation is opposed to this choice on the grounds of political neutrality mentioned in its statutes, and threatens not to attend the Conference if the choice is upheld. Finally, it wins the case and the theme will be: ”The Settlements and modern times”. This attitude is symptomatic. As a matter of fact, the French Social Centres refuse to enter the political game, which is not the case of the American Settlements, for instance. The French Social Centres, in the course of their history, have never been the architects of great social inquiries, the creation of trade unions or submission of social laws, which the American Settlements, led by Jane Addams, have been.

### *The continuity of the IFS and its social project*

During the pre-war period and the war itself (1939-1945) the Settlements and their International Federation were

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Acts from the 4th Settlements’ International Congress , held from 16 to 20 July 1932 in Berlin, edited by FCSF the 1933, p. 6.

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Founder of the Federation of Settlements of Holland and future General Secretary of the IFS.

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Acts of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Settlements’ International Conference held from 30 June to 5 July 1926 at the Cité University in Paris, edited by the FCSF in 1927 p. 124

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Acts the first International Conference on Social Services , Paris 8-13 July 1928, vol.III, edited Paris in 1929, p.281.

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Acts of the 2nd International Settlements’ Congress held from 30 June to 5 July 1926 at the Cité Universitaire, Paris, edited by the FCSF in 1927, p124.

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to a large extent weakened. For example, the Nazi regime banned the Settlements in Austria and Germany. Toynbee Hall was badly damaged by bombing. To its credit, in 1947, the French Federation undertook restoring the International Federation by calling for an “International Day” to take place in Paris in September 1947, bringing together 150 delegates from America and Europe. The theme chosen for this meeting was : «The role of the users in the management (of the social centres) and in the direction of their activities ». The objective is also to reconstitute the Executive Committee of the IFS. The French Federation offers to carry out the most arduous task, that of the Permanent Secretariat. The President of the French Federation, Mme Margot-Noblemaire, then becomes the General Secretary of the IFS, and the General Secretary of the French Federation, Mlle Maze, becomes the vice-General Secretary. This Committee, constituted de facto from 1947 onwards will be officialised in 1949. The French Federation will exercise the function of Permanent Secretariat up until 1956.

**This new committee will be very active.** In particular, it will organize two International Conferences. The first one, held in Amsterdam in 1952 has the theme: “Social Centres in the service of human relations”. The second one, held in Berlin in 1956 deals with the issue : « The growth and development of social activities in support of neighbourhood activities ».

By 1956, the situation of working-class has changed radically. The middle-classes emerge, social laws give rise to new rights and many specialised Social Services are created, bringing with them an increase in the number of professional social workers, including within the Settlements. **So what is still now the usefulness and specificity of the Settlements ?** During the closing session of the International Conference of 1956, the Executive Director of the American Federation, John Mac Dowell, **criticises the disintegration creeping into the Settlements and energetically reaffirms the basic principles** that must be respected. From the whole of his interpellation let us cite the following extracts :

« Our work must be guided by this principle : help others to help themselves. In other words, **we must work with people and not for people.** We all say that we are impregnated by this truth, but it is more difficult to act in conformity with this than to claim it in theory. For example it happens that professional workers violate these precepts in the following cases :

- When the case-worker does nothing to put forward social reforms ;
- When the recreation-worker fails to realise that civic activities are leisure activities suitable for developing the evolution of a community ;
- When the community-worker determines himself the goal of the community work, instead of bringing the members of each group to define the objectives that they want to achieve together;

Knowing how to help people to work together, is what is most important, and must be given priority. **It is only when people work effectively together that democracy and progress in a community become a reality. It is only when the members of a community define the objectives that they seek to achieve, that they will be able to engage, fully and freely their energy.** »<sup>8</sup>

These questioning and prescriptions, formulated in 1956, could no doubt still be used today to **analyse ways of behaving and purposes of the Settlements.**

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