



29TH INF-FNI CONGRESS 2004 IN CROATIA.
**THEME « BACK TO THE ROOTS, THE FUTURE OF ORGANIZED
NATURISM ».**

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the development of the industrialization era largely induced that of the urbanization and the thickening of the population around the new centres of activity. New ways of life profiled themselves; the town life favoured the access to more comfort, to the proximity of trade and cultural places, to the public equipments. But this existence of attractive aspect imperceptibly created new needs. Means of transport manufactured by industry: urban and interurban railways, first motorized vehicles, bicycles, were used for a great part to find fragments of this open-air life which was daily happening of the inhabitants during centuries. This need for impregnation by nature appeared in varied forms: excursions, stays of holidays, weekend cottages, worker gardens, and mountain hikes, to quote only some examples. On different degrees, this need for contact with our natural elements became conscious and the emergence of the slogan "back to the sources" inspired some to go to the end of the reasoning by refusing any barrier between humans and nature; thus nudity in natural environment came back, in a limited way certainly, after centuries of repression by the social institutions.

The wars had temporarily diverted the populations of these good aspirations, but it was only a time of latency and the middle of the twentieth century was like a starting point of the implementation of all kinds of philosophies among which naturism was already very present.

Then came the time called later, at least in France, "the Thirty Glorious". The euphoria of the growth and the expansion led to a material development without precedent. While enjoying the access to goods to which the former generations never dared to dream in their youth, the new consumers were vaguely conscious that this beautiful medal could have a reverse. Many new city-dwellers were taken of nostalgia of the bucolic life of their childhood and the concept "back to the sources" became more popular. The means of escape developed in parallel and the idea of enjoying nature took place in the manners. This thirst for contact with the elements was at such point essential for a big number of inhabitants of our industrialized countries that they felt, still much more than their elder, this need for total communication with the environment that only integral nudity within nature can provide.

However, this time still was very marked by concepts of decency associated with religious values and nudity was badly accepted by most of the population. To give him an appearance of legitimacy, the followers lived it certainly in joy, but on a background of austerity compensating a supposed image of depravity. It was often associated to it vegetarianism, prohibition of all stimulants, life in withdrawal of modernity since modernity moves us away from nature; sport was encouraged and everybody was obliged to put on a sportswear in the case of needing to be dressed. The application of all these rules could take place only in closed places arranged for this purpose and gradually our countries were constellated with enclosed and occulted grounds allowing the practice of naturism under conditions of relative quietude.

Thus strongly developed the phenomenon of creation of naturist associations with, like each human institution, their rules and regulations, a classic condition of a basic organization. By the specificity of naturism, these rules varied little from one to the other of the entities, which were by this fact easy to federate. Several federations existed already at the beginning of the Fifties and in 1953, the federation of all the federations, the INF, was born under the impulse of particularly eminent adherents who set the goal to put naturism for the use of the greatest number of people. One of them, Albert Lecocq, would have still achieved many other processes if he had not prematurely lost his life in 1968. But may be allowed to me to recall that his wife Christiane continued to remain faithful to him while remaining faithful to naturism. Look please: with more than 90 years, she made

the travel from Paris to commemorate with us what she founded with her husband more than fifty years ago.

At first isolated, then local, after regional, national and finally worldwide, the naturist movement thus became a planetary organization. One of the great merits of the federations is to have, in each country, successively listed all the naturist entities. After globalisation of this information in a guide initiated by the INF, the naturists could have up of the first years of its existence, an effective mean to meet, make acquaintances and to open the minds to other cultures in a nice atmosphere between friends living the same ideal.

At the end of the Sixties, the constraints of the censure were quickly slackened and a part of the press, which could be used like means of diffusion of our ideas, brought us many new followers. The minds released themselves, but the respect of others remained strongly anchored in mentalities. This quality and at the same time the rejection of constraining practices and unreasoned obligations constituted a good background for the naturism which had no difficulty to adapt to this vision. In the Seventies, our movement continued to increase parallel with others, which supported ideas very similar to those, which were ours at that time. Let us remember for example the Communities of the Arch of Lanza del Vasto, of Findhorn in Scotland, the hippies movement, the new-age tendency, the yoga schools and other groups giving priority to the human being and his blooming, to brotherhood, to the valorisation of life, to the refusal of violence, to love and respect of nature. The concept of tolerance became normality and it resulted an ascending current for the recognition from our ideas.

To live free and to be also able to release oneself from all vestimentary constraint, represented for many people a reaction against a too strict educational yoke; so, it came to an increasing demand which could not be satisfied any more only by the associations. In certain countries, this tendency encouraged investors to enter the crenel. Naturist commercial holiday centres quickly developed in several countries. Taking care to convey a correct image in front of the public opinion, the leaders of these centres referred with pleasure to the federations which, thanks to their moral rigour, had beforehand swept the way to them and facilitated their acceptance near the authorities and of the opinion. Organized naturism thus widened of a significant branch, which drained a growing number of followers towards this harmonious and mainly family life.

But the idea of social nudity did not stop at the doors of the centres, whether associative or commercial. Little by little, in a certain number of countries, the partisans of integral nudity spontaneously invested the seashores and other water shores, with results being located between the total refusal of the vicinity and the official recognition, while passing by more or less tacit acceptances. Several factors influence the success of these initiatives: the political regimes, the mentalities and habits of the inhabitants, the degree of evolution of the local authorities, to quote only some of them. Anyway, always where these steps were crowned by success, the naturist opportunity was and continues to be largely used by many users who prefer not to subject themselves to regulations in their eyes too constraining. This vision is comprehensible, even admissible, more especially as certain persons in charge of organized centres contributed largely to the official acceptance of nudity on such spots, sometimes to offer in complement possibilities of natural bathe missing on their own premises.

These places often have in common their proximity of water in a form or in another and their access to any public. Is that last characteristic interesting? Without doubt if the site is mainly attended by naturists attached to our values, because it can be used by us as window and encourage neophytes to adopt our manner of living. In the other cases, various alternatives arise: naked and dressed people together, search for adventures, spaces of various meetings, satisfaction of phantasms, etc...

It is then not any more in correspondence with what we propose, because the sense of family asserted by our movement is not very present there. But beware of judging: generally we find there despite of all much tolerance, a quality we like very much, let us just explain the differences.

Other observations could be made. In certain countries like Germany, naturist spots are open for everybody, but their access is subjected to a small financial contribution for the maintenance of the places. The behaviour of the users is generally correct there. Elsewhere, as in France for example, the beach clubs induce by the presence of their members an acceptable behaviour on public sites.

Although not being really in these two cases in what we consider as organized naturism, it proves that a minimum of supervision confers to the users a safety, which they do not find on places out of any control. But are these examples not also related to some extent to a kind of organized naturism?

What can be observed by looking more closely is that the presence of a structure is rather well accepted and felt like reassuring. What is currently less the in thing, it is the participation of all in a common work.

The individualism supported by the personal motorized transports, the computers confining each one in its bubble, the shows delivered at home by television, a whole which gives an illusion of independence in regard to his neighbour, diverts people of community life and the disciplines which are attached to it. The naturist, who does not escape of the context of his time, becomes more consumer. This amalgam between the acceptance of a kind of no constraining structure and satisfaction of his individualism constitutes a favourable base to get customers in the commercial holiday centres where they buy naturist services. The disadvantage, increasingly palpable, is that in this branch of activity like all others, the customer who pays feels to be a king and respects or not, with his personal liking, the rules which gave during a long time to the centres their specific aspect, in particular the permanent nudity of all. How are we arrived to that deterioration of certain centres which represented a privileged world for a long time?

On the origin, the users came for a great part from the associative world and justified themselves by their member card. In certain countries like France, this justification was the rule and was used to filter the holidaymakers. Meanwhile, a costumer base, more or less naturist, was constituted and for the reasons we have just seen, was not eager of community life. To their intention were invented the "passports" which were actually only a formality of entry providing directly or indirectly incomes for the federations and in the majority of the cases for the centres, which sold them with a substantial appreciation. And there the naturist world is entangled in the traps of money with the consequences we know.

We are not yet out of there. The French federation was touched straight by this phenomenon and the leaders of the other federations worry about their future. Groups and sub-groups reject rightly or wrongly the responsibilities to each other and crises take place. The INF is told off and is accused of inefficiency. But like the national federations, the INF has not any legal coercive capacity upon companies respecting the laws of their country, even if they are naturist. The INF has not either the capacity to prevent the human to function differently than human. Now, the naturist movement is a human institution, it is not to be forgotten.

In this complicated situation which touches since two years the European federations, the INF as well as possible affirms its solidarity with them while refusing any compromising with organizations with doubtful intentions. Thus the INF was brought to cancel last year the festivities of its fiftieth anniversary and the sporting meetings, which were attached to it. Envisaged in two big French commercial centres, these major events were reduced to an international pétanque tournament in Germany, on the ground of an association where in fringe, certain leaders of our movement could meet friendly in an informal way. The minds, still adjusted on an initially programmed solemnity, could by this fact appreciate the atmosphere created by voluntary members who worked steadily to make this event a success. And everyone rediscovered the naturism of the origins: great communication between all, sense of the friendship and sharing of our values. This example, like others proceeding in associative sphere, showed that if the life in clubs is of course subject to some very necessary rules cropping a little on the individualism of each one, it offers on the other hand an atmosphere of mutual respect characterizing the naturism of the origins.

Is it then necessary to become manic heist and to say that the good naturists would be the club members of the less good the others? Of course no! There are commercial centres managed by naturist owners whose ideal precedes the concept of sales turnover and who prefer to give up customers seeking to live nudity "à la carte" rather than to nauseate, as that happens unfortunately more and more, the authentic naturists by the visual pollution of textile customers for whom however 99% of the whole existing tourist accommodations are available. At the same time, that should not release the associative clubs accommodating the naturists of passage to prohibitory tariffs, which is in

contradiction with the respect of others we proclaim, or others who do not think any more about the natural life and its rules or others who still refuse to evolve by forgetting that what they built has also to be used by the future generations.

At this point of the reflexion, how have we to glance as responsible actors of organized naturism to the future of our movement? In the light of what we observe, we realize that it is possible to practise naturism in a healthy way under various alternatives. Not organized, it is often the opportunity of the first step for potential members coming to join our circles.

In its organized phase, we saw that the role of the federations is irreplaceable. They must continue to federate their members and militants by always privileging our life style. They can give their recommendation to the profit of the promoters and managers of companies who have chosen their activity on the basis of naturism and make of it a noble trade and of high moral value and who are themselves impregnated and convinced by our philosophy, ready to transmit it to their personnel while acting by the example. These values, sometimes a little lost of sight by short-term worries, must remain our unifying thread.

The INF will only be strong if all its member federations, while adapting to the world, which surround them, remain faithful to the incompressible principles universally proclaimed and recognized thirty years ago in France at the Congress of Sérignan. The naturists who purchase their annual stamp must be aware that by this action they support of course the recognition of naturism in their country, but also its access under worthy conditions by citizens of countries calling upon the INF to find the arguments enabling them to intervene with their authorities.

Let us not lose us in destroying quarrels while other countries open to naturism and set up their new structures in the pioneer mind which animated our elder a few decades earlier. Only this return to our roots will ensure the perennality of a serene naturism.

Charles Obergfell
INF Vice-president