

## *The National Child*

*The charity and educational activity of the Child Protection  
Union of Bulgaria 1925-1944*

Bulgarian Child Protection Union was a result of the world wide wave of organisations for child protection founded after World War. One on the initiative of the International Union for Child Protection. The base of its activity was the Geneva Declaration of Child's Rights from 1924:

By the present Declaration of Child's Rights commonly known as the "Geneva Declaration", men and women of all nations, recognising that mankind owes to the child the best it has to give, declare and accept it as their duty, beyond and above all considerations of race, nationality or creed.

1. The child must be given the means requisite for its normal development, both materially and spiritually.
2. The child that is hungry must be fed; the child that is sick must be nursed; the child that is backward must be helped; the delinquent child must be reclaimed; and the orphan and the waif must be sheltered and succoured.
3. The child must be the first to receive relief in times of distress.
4. The child must be put in a position to earn a livelihood, and must be protected against every form of exploitation.
5. The child must be brought up in the consciousness that its talents must be devoted to the service of its fellow men.

The ideology and the practice of the Union for Child Protection in Bulgaria (UChPB) is seen in the light of historical changes of the public attitude towards children.

The UChPB was founded in a time when Bulgaria was a country of many children. The infant mortality rate was very high - about 140-150/1000, especially among the village children. Despite the

numerous women's, teachers', Christian and Red Cross organisations founded in the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, carrying out charity activity for children, they practically were not touching the problems of the peasant children. The care of the abandoned and the illegitimate children was very limited and the attitude towards homeless and vagrant children was negative.

World War I created new groups of children living in poverty: orphans, refugee children, etc. The reparations imposed upon Bulgaria increased the poverty of the families and worsened the living conditions of children. The parents' ignorance towards the health and hygiene norms of the children raising was pointed out by the physicians and teachers as a reason for the high infant morbidity and mortality rate. In that situation the UChPB put the children in the full glare of publicity, evoking wide social sympathy for children's life and uniting the efforts of the institutions, of which the improvement of children's living conditions depended. The Union was founded in Sofia by some enthusiasts, mainly Red Cross activists, public figures and teachers. Its first president became the founder of Bulgarian paediatrics Prof. Stefan Vatev. The UChPB set the task of creating its own organisation net and evoking the social energy for the charity of children. For the purpose it was organising Day of the Child in every village in the Messenger of Peace Sunday each year. The Union organised a travelling health exhibition showing the modern care for children, which visited a few hundred villages. The first actions of the UChPB in Bulgaria were to support the refugee children from Macedonian and Thrace during 1925 and 1926 and to help children suffered of the Chirpan earthquake in 1928. These actions were organised with the assistance of the International Union of Child Protection messenger Fredericka Freund. She organised the first free soup-kitchen for village children.

In 1927 under the initiative of Konstanza Liapcheva, who was a

vice-president of Bulgarian UChP, training courses started for people, meant for charity and educational activity in the villages. They were called teacher advisors, women who were trained to arrange free soup-kitchens in the village schools, hold lectures, search for sick children and orphans and direct them to the corresponding social institutions, help the parents, especially the young mothers. In the next years more than 1000 teacher-advisors were trained and the UChP settled in the villages mainly through them. Thus in the 30's the UChP included more than 3000 local organisations, 3500 soup-kitchens, 116 kindergartens, about 200 summer camps and about 500 summer play-grounds for children. The teacher-advisors and the rest of the UChP activists in Bulgaria work absolutely voluntarily and for free in the field of charity, saving great public funds. All collected donations and public funds were under a strict accounting. The union worked in the plain sight of the whole society not just regarding the funds, but regarding the care of the children: the day regimen in the children's institutions, the daily menu, etc. are made public. The Public Support Law of 1934 put the field of charity for children and adults under much stronger state control and centralised them. The UChPB fought to protect the public charity and to show that it can only be of help to the social policy of the state. The ideology of the UChPB established on the base of the Geneva Declaration of Child's Rights developed during the 20's, the 30's and during World War II in the typical for Bulgaria public climate. This ideology was revealed by the articles in the Union's "Our Child" magazine, and in "Child's Day" magazine. Other publications of the Union had also been used, as well as the children's health exhibition and the reports of the teacher-advisors.

The Union contributed to the creation of child's image as an ultimate public value, spreading the public care especially among the most distressed groups of children. There are 3 basic

components in the Union's ideology. On the first place stands the universal base of the public duty to all children, prompted by the Geneva Declaration. Upon it was built the modernisation pathos of the 20's and the 30's, which motivated many of the Union's activists to work in the villages and popularise the modern norms of children care. The third component was the national one - the Union made popular the care for the children in Bulgaria, as a care for the future of the country, and accepted the condition of the children as an indicator of the achievements of the Bulgarian society. This concept was held open thanks to the constant connections of the Union with the international movement for child protection. However, the strong national element does not allow the complete break up of the frames of the public sensitiveness towards all children.

After the communist revolution the state took direct part in the Union's development. The new authority rejected charity in society. The leaders of the UChPB tried to protect the necessity of charity for children, but they were unseated for disloyalty to the new authority. The UChP was officially dismissed in 1951. The charity for children disappeared from the public life for a long time.

For the two decades of its existence, the UChPB managed to get into every place where children grow, to study the conditions in which they live and to help their parents. New field of public activity was established in which people of different parts of the society participate. These people built new channels of the public debate about children and the public duty towards them and tried to impose the international standards of attitude towards children. Then the new problems of the child's rights emerged, and the history of the UChP was part of those social efforts aiming to make children's life better and just.

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*The Charity and Educational Activity*  
*of the Union for Child Protection*  
*in Bulgaria /1925 - 1944/*

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