

SOME IMPRESSIONS OF THE PRESENTATION  
OF THE SOCIETY DURING THE STUTTGART CONGRESS

After the hectic days of the Congrès mondial des sciences historiques I went home very contentedly and even in a euphoric mood. I know of course that it is fairly well possible to be critical of some aspects, and they tell me that a German fellow-member is going to vent some critical remarks. And right he is, for there is no reason to be self-satisfied, and my contentment does not imply that everything has been perfect. But as I am, with Jeismann and Pellens, a veteran of the ill-famed congress at Bucarest in 1980, I see an enormous progress, when I compare both congresses with each other.

In Bucarest, when the International Society was only a new-born baby, with about 35 members from only a few countries, there has been hardly any presentation of history teaching, teacher training and history didactics. There was an official report, composed by people who had no relationship whatsoever with history teaching or teacher training, most of them being university professors. But not only the report was very academical, it was also very political. The only thing the members of the Society who were present, could do was to protest (which they did in not ambiguous terms) and to draw the attention of the gathering to our Society. When I compare these things with the role we played in the proceedings in Stuttgart, I can hardly believe my eyes and ears. In Stuttgart we have had two whole days at our disposal, filled by a great number of speeches and lectures and by discussions; and all the speakers were people who are 'in the know', real didacticians and teacher trainers. So everybody knew what we were talking about.

My second impression is that the International Society for History Didactics has grown to be a real 'society of friends'. There is still the old core of colleagues, that existed already before the official foundation in 1980; others have joined us then and in later years, and there are newcomers who easily find their place among us. And although we come from many countries, from Poland to Canada and

from Finland to Spain, and although we speak many languages, we manage to understand one another, and are always glad to meet again. And therefore not only the proceedings in that immense (and cheerless) Beethovensaal of the Liederhalle were important, but also our meetings at lunch time and at dinner, in the evenings, when we had everything behind us.

And my third impression is that of the constantly recurring themes in the lectures and the discussions. I think I could note four of them: 1. What is history didactics (partly fired off by Hannam's pertinent questions in the latest issue of 'Communications')? 2. Why is it that nearly everywhere the development of history didactics is lagging behind that of other school disciplines? This question was put especially by Guderzo in his contribution. 3. Is 'world history' possible? This question was put implicitly by Mork in his speech, and it played an important role in several speeches about history teaching and ethnic minorities (in accordance with the main theme of the congress 'L'image de l'autre'). For the point is whether all our different histories are congruous with each other. The histories of several ethnic minorities are certainly discontinuous with that of the ruling majority (in the contributions of Laville and Elma Collins this became extremely clear). 4. There is a kind of 'cultural lag' between the way we, as historians and history teachers, use to present history to pupils and general public and what pupils and public expect of history or understand by history. Jeismann has spoken about a 'capital' controlled by 'bankers' (the historians), and I myself added that there is also a 'black market'. It seems to me that we must use the 'Communications' to discuss these themes in the coming years.