

The ROERICH PACT and BANNER OF PEACE.

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As far back as 1904 , Nicholas Roerich the well known Russian artist and explorer conceived the idea of a Pact for safeguarding the Artistic and Scientific Institutions and Historic Monuments , in all countries , in time of war and peace . The destruction caused by the first world war urged him to realize this project and, in 1930, he called upon Dr George Ohklaver, Professor of Law at the Paris University, to draft the legal form of the Pact . In the same year a Commission of the Roerich Pact and Banner of Peace was formed in New York and in Paris with its headquarters in Bruges. In 1933 an international convention of the Roerich Pact and banner of Peace held at Washington obtained the support of 35 countries who recommended it to the Governments of all Nations.

On April 15.th. 1935 the treaty of the Roerich Pact was signed by the official representatives of the United States and by 20 Latin-American countries in the office of President Roosevelt at the White House in Washington. In Oct 1937 the Congress of Roerich Baltic Societies agreed to create Banner of Peace Committees in all the Baltic States, and similar Committees were formed in Italy, Belgium, Switzerland , France, England, Portugal , Argentine and India. The Banner of Peace, emblem of the Roerich Pact is intended to fly over all cultural institutions throughout the world. It represents a trio of spheres within a circle , in magenta colour on a pure white background and can be taken as a symbol of Religion, Art and Science. The banner has already been unfurled above a number of institutions throughout the world . As Nicholas Roerich , in his message to the Washington Convention said - " If the Red Cross affirms physical health , so may the Banner of Peace affirm the spiritual health of mankind "

The Banner is to be considered as an instrument for the protection of Art Treasures throughout the world as it is clearly stated in the Treaty itself which runs as follows : -

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The High Contracting Parties , animated by the purpose of giving conventional form to the postulates of the Resolution approved on Dec 16. 1933 by all the States represented at the Seventh International Conference of American States , held at Montevideo, which recommended to " the Governments of America

which have not yet done so that they sign the Roerich Pact initiated by the Roerich Museum in the United States, and which has as its object, the universal adoption of a flag, already designed and generally known, in order thereby to preserve in any time of danger all nationally and privately owned immovable monuments which form the cultural treasures of peoples" have resolved to conclude a treaty with that end in view and to the effect that the treasures of culture be respected and protected in time of war and peace, have agreed upon the following articles.

Article 1.

The historic monuments, museums, scientific, artistic, educational and cultural institutions shall be considered as neutral and as such respected and protected by the belligerents.

The same respect and protection shall be accorded to the historic monuments, museums, scientific, artistic, educational and cultural institutions in time of peace as well as in war.

Article 2.

The neutrality of, and protection and respect due to, the monuments and institutions mentioned in the preceding article, shall be recognized in the entire expanse of territories subject to the sovereignty of each of the signatories and acceding States, without any discrimination as to the State allegiance of said monuments and institutions. The respective Governments agree to adopt the measures of internal legislation necessary to insure said protection and respect.

Article 3.

In order to identify the monuments and institutions mentioned in article 1, use may be made of a distinctive flag (red circle with a triple red sphere in the circle on a white background) in accordance with the model attached to this treaty.

Article 4.

The signatory Governments and those which accede to this treaty, shall send to the Pan American Union, at the time of signature or accession, or at any time thereafter, a list of the monuments and institutions for which they desire the protection agreed to in this treaty.

The Pan American Union, when notifying the Governments of signatures or accessions, shall also send the list of monuments and institutions mentioned in this article, and shall inform the other Governments of any changes in said list.

Article 5.

The monuments and institutions mentioned in article 1 shall cease to enjoy the privileges recognized in the present treaty in case they are made use of for military purposes.

Article 6.

The States which do not sign the present treaty on the date it opened for signature, may sign or adhere to it at any time.

Article 7.

The instruments of accession as well as those of ratification and denunciation of the present treaty shall be deposited with the Pan American Union, which shall communicate notice of the act of deposit to the other signatory or acceding States.

Article 8.

The present treaty may be denounced at any time by any of the signatory or acceding States and the denunciation shall go into effect three months after notice of it has been given to the other signatory or acceding States.

In witness whereof, the undersigned Plenipotentiaries, after having deposited their full powers found to be in due and proper form, sign this treaty on behalf of their respective governments, and affix thereto their seals, on the dates appearing opposite their signatures.

The principle Museums throughout the world endorsed the Pact, from the start, and the leading spirits of the time - King Albert of Belgium, President Roosevelt Rabōndranath Tagore, Maurice Maeterlinck, Marshal Lyautey, gave their enthusiastic support while great military authorities such as the Baron de Theun lectured on the Pact in the military schools . To this can be added the adherence of hundreds of the leading, politicians, artists, scientists and writers throughout the world.

As Dr George Chklaver explained : - " Seldom are all nations of the world stirred by the same thought , seldom are they united by the same endeavour. It was given to Nicholas Roerich to create a movement which has won the enthusiastic support of Governments and peoples alike; thus it was proved once more that Beauty, Knowledge and Culture are the best means to bring together the 'Membra disjecta' of humanity "

To-day there are many who are ready to object that with the advent of atomic warfare such a Pact will be of little avail. However this does not seem to be the opinion of UNESCO . At the ' Intergovernmental Conference on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict ' held by this organization at the Hague on July 3, 1954 and signed by 39 countries special mention was made of the Roerich Pact : - " In 1935 , a Pact concerning the protection of art and science institutions and of historic monuments was signed in Washington (Roerich Pact) The Pact contained some very extensive provisions ; it applied not merely to historical monuments and museums, but to all institution devoted to science, art, education and culture ."

There is every reason to think that the Hague Conference of 1954 had its source in the Roerich Pact. Four years previous to this the Roerich Pact Committee had sent Dr J. Torres Bodet at that time Director General of Unesco , a copy of the Pact with extracts from an extensive literature on the subject. The Hague Conference had also imitated the Roerich Banner in the form of an emblem - a light blue equilateral triangle on a white circle- which had nothing like the profound signification of the Roerich emblem. President Roosevelt in his international broadcast on the Pact showed that he had intuitively understood its real importance when he said " This Treaty possesses a spiritual significance far deeper than the text of the instrument itself "

To judge the Pact according to the materialistic and scientific fashions of the moment would be misleading. Nicholas Roerich was essentially a man of the future . He was inspired by the certitude of a New Era based on spiritual activities and psychic energies of a very high order - higher than atomic energies ! It is not to be supposed then, that such an advanced spirit could have been wholly mistaken . Moreover the Western outlook to-day has not yet taken into account the vast reservoirs of spiritual power that are latent in Asia and have only now started to reawaken. Nicholas Roerich , on the contrary took his inspiration from these spiritual sources and they gave him the certitude of a future more constructive, more tolerant, more cultured and more luminous than the world of to-day.

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