

## NEWS AND NOTES

### CARE OF THE BLIND

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Government and social care of the blind is based on the policy of a 10-year course for all blind children, and help in the choice of a suitable profession, so that they can take care of themselves and their families.

Bulgaria has about 3500 blind men, women and children. Most have lost their sight through accident. 10% have been born blind, and about 15% through glaucoma and trachoma. Recent statistics have marked a drop—a fact explained by improvement of our public health services in town and country.

Organized care of the blind started soon after the turn of the century. The first school for blind children was opened in Sofia in 1905 on the initiative of the eminent Bulgarian humanitarian scientist professor, Ivan Shishmanov, Minister of Public Education.

The aim of the school was to help children master some skill or profession. The initial results were highly encouraging and the school rapidly expanded its teaching schedules. The ministry of education made sincere attempts to apply the law on compulsory elementary education to the schools for the blind.

The school still exists, and has grown into a large system with class-rooms, gymnasiums

and workshops, taking care of about 200 children. The whole course of training is entirely free of charge (only boarders pay a minimum sum, depending on their parents' income).

A second school for blind children was founded at Varna in 1948 on the same lines as the school in Sofia.

Both the schools take in children after the age of seven. The first is a preparatory year, and then the young boys and girls follow the progress of our ordinary elementary schools. The emphasis is laid on music classes, as many blind children show a surprising aptitude for music. They specialize as pianists, violinists or instrumentalists in general, and often music becomes their profession in later life.

There are several professions which all blind children can learn with a high degree of proficiency: brush-making, weaving, articles made by press-work (plastics, bakelite and typewriting).

While the normal elementary schools have eight grades, those for blind children have 10, in order to make certain that they have learned their subject and some craft.

The teachers in these schools are university graduates who have spent some time at a school for blind children, in order to gain sufficient practical experience. It is only

then that graduates can appear for their state examinations and get their diplomas.

After their elementary school studies, blind children are given an opportunity of continuing their studies at secondary schools and universities. Blind high school and university students are given state scholarships as well as support by the Union of the Bulgarian Blind. This last has special scholarship grants for talented children going to universities.

Bulgaria has over eighty blind university graduates (music, philosophy, literature, law, mathematics, history, pedagogical, sciences etc.). A talented blind girl has been given a scholarship by the Union for the Faculty of Mathematics.

Petko Stainov, one of the Bulgaria's modern best known composers, is blind. He has been awarded the title of People's Artist and is a member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. He has been elected as Member of Parliament and is at present Director of the Institute of Music at the Academy. The press often publishes articles by the talented musician and pedagogue. He is also a graduate of the Sofia school for blind children, finishing his secondary studies in Bulgaria and then the conservatoire of Music at Dresden in Germany.

Konstantin Gaidarov, graduate of the Faculty of Law in Sofia, is a scientific worker at the Academy of Sciences, Spas Karafezov, another blind university graduate, is the legal attorney of one of our major industrial enterprises.

Many others have won distinction in the musical world. Vassil Koev, Marko Markov and Mihail Karamihailov are popular conductors. The baritone Hristo Marinov is soloist in one of our professional choruses. Kiril Rostov is often heard on Radio Sofia, for he is one of our very best flute players.

Our state educational institutions publish much literature in Braille, and also use tape recordings for high school and university students. This method has aroused keen interest in the blind and their progress has been found to be more rapid.

The Union of the Bulgarian Blind has a well stocked library and reading room, with more than 8000 volumes. Works of fiction, poetry and various branches have been tape-recorded. The blind can use all these facilities entirely free of charge.

As the tape-recorders have come to play a prominent part in the life of blind people, the state sells recorders to blind people at special low prices, so that they can make or borrow and play recordings in their homes.

The library department of the Union prepares special recordings to help high school and university students in their work and examinations. There is a stock of recordings made after the school or university standard curricula, or to suit special requirements of studies on demand.

The state budget provides credits for the maintenance of the schools for blind children, for books and manuals, materials for the workshops, etc.

Special concern is shown for blind people in the middle age or elderly group, if they are unable to work (lost their sight late in life), if they have no pension or any other means of subsistence. Such people are given a state monthly allowance, usually by the People's Council of their respective inhabited locality.

Urban transport is free of charge for all blind people and anyone who should accompany them.

Two homes for the blind have been set up—the one at Haskovo for men and the

other at Pirdop for women—for people who are incapable of looking after themselves and have no family or relatives to do it. These homes are maintained by the state and the blind pay nothing.

The blind can be pensioned off with the minimum required length of service—a period of five years. In such case they receive 80% of their normal pay (or 60% of the normal pay if receiving a monthly wage or salary of over 120 leva).

Most of the blind work in workshops specially created for them. These workshops are usually under the management of the Union of the Bulgarian Blind.

A few words about the organization structure and activities of the Union.

The first organization of the Bulgarian blind was set up in 1920 by war invalids of the First World War. In 1921 an organization was formed of the blind by birth or through disease or accident. A third organization was created for blind through accidents at work. All the three organizations were actually charitable institutions, collecting funds for the purpose of distributing aid. Only one of them was able to organize a workshop, employing about 60 craftsmen.

Before the socialist revolution in Bulgaria in 1944 the blind were usually street vendors or musicians. Only few were able to take up teaching, or work in offices.

The People's Government has taken special measures to assist the blind to become self-confident and useful members of our new society, particularly through special schools and manual training shops. The three organizations effected a merger forming the present Union of the Bulgarian Blind, with a membership of 25000. Only children and the very old are not members of the Union although they too stand to benefit by its activities.

The state gradually transferred to the management of the Union four of its manual training workshops. They have grown into fairly large industrial enterprises (in Sofia, Varna, Plovdiv and Drishovo), giving employment to many blind people. They have also formed branch workshops in many other localities of the country, employing small group of blind men and women.

These factories for blind workers now produce plastic goods, suit-cases, basketry, brushes, small parts and units for the electrical engineering works. Here too mechanization has alleviated manual work to a considerable extent and the work of the blind is in many cases just as highly productive as that of any other ordinary workers.

Under a special government Decree, the Union of the Bulgarian Blind is entitled to reduce the working and production targets of blind workers by 50%. Blind workers have a 6-hour in the ordinary professions, with 8-hour normal working day.

The Bulgarian working class has at its disposal many trade union rest and holiday homes on the Black Sea coast, in the mountains or at mineral water-resorts. The blind are given priority admission when they go on their paid annual holidays. In addition, there are three special rest homes for the blind workers: one in the Balkan mountains and two at the seaside. Blind workers are accommodated for a 20-day shift and have to pay only 12 leva per shift (representing only a token share of the real expenses involved, the rest being paid by the state social security fund). Children under the age of 14 pay only half of that.

The Union of Bulgarian Blind organizes local libraries and reading rooms and supplies them with books and materials in the Braille alphabet, tape recordings and other materials. The Union also offers

suitable sporting facilities and helps organize dramatic actors, singers, and choruses.

Sports, athletics and tourism are healthy and interesting pastimes with the Bulgarian blind. Swimming and chess are also extremely popular. Plovdiv has a very good theatrical company of blind actors, who frequently stage plays in many other cities. Sofia has a professional mixed chorus of blind singers giving concerts over the Radio Sofia system and in every part of the country.

The Union organizes regular courses for foreign language studies. It publishes the magazine 'Life of the Blind' in Braille and

#### **STATE AND SOCIAL WELFARE FOR DEAF-MUTES IN BULGARIA**

According to an investigation made by Professor Georgi Yankov, Honorary President of the Union of Deaf-Mutes in Bulgaria, the numbers of deaf-mute people in the country does not exceed 5,000 (for a total population of 8 million). Deafness and dumbness in Bulgaria are most often due to serious diseases from which the patient has suffered in the past. Thanks to their prompt and proper treatment, the incidence of these diseases has now been substantially reduced and they are not accompanied by complications, as a result of which, according to Professor Yankov, the percentage of acquired deafness will be reduced still further, this forecast, however, should not exempt either our society or the state from taking the necessary welfare measures with respect to citizens of the Republic affected by the serious defect of not being to hear or speak. They must be systematically aided to enable them to attain the possibilities of their hearing and speaking fellow citizens. Such is, as

in Bulgarian ordinary script. The district organizations also have various papers and periodicals, giving news of the world, about scientific progress, sports, etc. The official organ of the Union always carries a special column of 'A Course in Philosophy'. It has other sections with subjects interesting for children and young readers, humour, and literary works of Bulgarian and foreign authors. The magazine appears in 62 large format pages.

The Union of Bulgarian Blind relies on the support and cooperation of the Bulgarian Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare for all its activities and care for the blind.

a matter of fact, the general policy pursued by the state with regard to the deaf-mute.

In Bulgaria the state and social welfare measures for deaf-mutes include :

1. The setting up of special educational establishments where they can get a suitable education and practical training for life, and,
2. the setting up of specialized enterprises where most of the deaf-mutes can find employment, so as not to be dependent upon their families.

How is the education of the deaf-mutes organized?

The first school for deaf-mutes in Bulgaria was organised in 1898 by the German pedagogue Ferdinand Urbich, who was also its first headmaster.

On September 1, 1906 Urbich's school was turned into a state Institute for the Education of Deaf Children. At present there are 8 special schools for deaf-mute children in the country, the course takes two years.

Before they enter the special school for deaf-mutes, children are trained in special weekly kindergartens. In them they are under the permanent observation and care of specialists, one of whom must obligatorily be a specialist in teaching deaf-mute children.

At the kindergarten the children are trained both physically and mentally, and are taught how to speak. Special attention is paid to preserving the existing store of words and voice in the child, to developing its sense organs and especially its speech when there are traces of hearing.

The first class of the school is preparatory. Teaching in it is conducted according to the analytical and synthetic method, whereas teaching them to speak is continued with the aid of the sign language. The task is to develop elementary speech.

In the following years the teaching of deaf-mute children takes place under a special planned programme and with special textbooks. Textbooks for all disciplines studied by deaf-mute children have been published in the country.

The school for deaf-mute children aims at securing a system that will help the development not only of speech, but also of children's social, mental and physical capacities. Teaching is placed on a strictly scientific basis. Special attention is paid to labour education. The approach here is fully differentiated, in accordance with the traces of hearing, the time when deafness has set in and the intellectual development of the child. It is on this basis that the schools themselves are divided for deaf-mutes suffering from oligophrenia and for hard of hearing deaf-mutes, with classes for children in whom there are traces of hearing. The aim is to create conditions for removing the consequences of their defective hearing by

mobilizing all the pupils' compensation possibilities.

From the beginning of their existence, the schools for deaf-mutes in Bulgaria have observed the following didactic rules, which have not lost their significance to this day :

Develop the power of speech in the deaf-mute children the way it is developed in a normal child;

Provoke in the deaf-mute child the need to speak;

Always show the deaf-mute child the objects about which you are speaking;

Direct your training always according to the pupils' needs to speak.

At all schools for deaf-mute children (which are scattered all over the country) there are well-equipped workshops in which the children can, according to their inclinations, get practical training for some trade, such as carpentry, woodcarving, tailoring and dressmaking, shoemaking, embroidery, etc.

After they finish their education at the special schools for deaf-mutes, children continue their education at the educational and industrial enterprises, organized through the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare. Their courses comprise two years. The schools themselves are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Public Education. Some of the children continue their education at the general educational schools—secondary and technical schools and then at the higher educational establishments.

At the educational and industrial enterprises of the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare, children study the theory and technology of the trade which they wish to learn, as well as drawing study of materials, etc. At the enterprises there are different departments: for cabinet-making,

machine knitting, tailoring and dress-making, basket weaving, shoemaking, suitcase and bagmaking, orthopedy, precision mechanics and metal-drilling, of a total of eight hours of study, four are devoted to theory, and four to practice.

At the educational and industrial enterprises the children are on full board, supported by the state. In the first eight months of their training they get no salary. The things which they produce go to cover their maintenance. Later on, when they start working under a norm, they pay half of their wages against the board and lodgings, which they get at the boarding school. If they have produced goods over and above established quota, they are duly remunerated.

There are hostels for backward children—one for boys and another for girls. Children who are admitted to them work in the fields or in small workshops. The expenses for their maintenance are assumed by the state. All children, regardless of whether their work has proved efficient or not, receive remuneration enabling them to meet their small personal expenses.

Thus, the care for deaf-mutes in the first years of their life is wholly assumed by the state. After they have graduated from a school and learned some vocation, deaf-mutes can enter one of 13 industrial enterprises, organized in 13 towns by the Union of deaf-mutes in Bulgaria. Some of them go to work at the co-operative farms, others become state employees.

But how are deaf-mutes in Bulgaria organized?

The first society of deaf-mutes was formed in 1934. Prior to it there had been another purely philanthropic society, formed by doctors and teachers, for the protection of deaf-mutes. Other societies of deaf-mutes were also set up later, whose goal was mutual assistance.

After September 9, 1944, when Bulgaria was liberated from monarcho-fascist tyranny and a people's democratic rule was established in the country, the societies of deaf-mutes formed the Union of Deaf-Mutes. It received substantial material and moral assistance from the state. The Union took the initiative of setting up the first producers' co-operative for deaf-mutes in the country. After this co-operative, in the beginning of 1957, 11 large industrial enterprises were opened and manned by deaf-mute men and women workers. They are all specialists in the production of plastics, printers, shoemakers, tailors, knitters, cabinet-makers, makers of matrices etc.

At present all able-bodied deaf-mute men and women are at work either at the Union's enterprises or at the state plants and factories.

The concentration of deaf-mutes workers in a given enterprise proved a very efficient method, because it created an excellent atmosphere for the development of the deaf-mutes' talents. It has been established that among hearing people deaf-mutes feel solitary and depressed by their defect. Here they cannot fully join the life of the collective, whereas in their own midst they can quickly specialize and have the opportunity, on an equal footing, to compete and score successes which sometimes surpass the norms of hearing workers. They have halls where they can practise sports and develop all kinds of cultural activities, canteens, libraries, etc.

The Union of Deaf-Mutes in Bulgaria has a membership of 3,600 mostly completely deaf people or people hard of hearing.

Every deaf-mute over the age of 16 is entitled to membership. Hearing people desirous of helping aims and purposes of the union, are also members of the respective societies. They are usually doctors, educators and relatives of the deaf-mute. The Union of Deaf-Mutes is assisted by the

Ministry of Education in its educational work and by the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare in adapting the deaf-mutes to suitable jobs.

At every society of deaf-mutes there are permanent courses for teaching deaf-mutes who have not gone to school to read and write. These courses are conducted by teachers from the special schools for deaf-mutes.

Deaf-mutes enhance their knowledge also in educational circles in which they study geography, history, public health, science and technology, the pictorial arts, theory of literature, etc.

A very popular form of mass cultural work are their amateur artistic activities. The ballet and theatre are popular with these circles. Not long ago a theatrical group of deaf-mutes in Sofia presented the pantomime "Twelfth Night" after Shakespeare with remarkable success. The dance company of deaf-mutes in Plovdiv was warmly welcomed by audiences in the German Democratic Republic and in Rumania.

Physical culture and sports, as well as tourism, have ardent admirers among the deaf-mute. Their favourite sports are football, basketball, volleyball, swimming, table tennis, chess, track-and field athletics, gymnastics, cycling, etc. Deaf-mute Bulgarian sportsmen took part in the silent games at Milan and Helsinki, where they won

3 gold, 18 silver and 7 bronze medals. Bulgarian chess-masters took part in the international competitions of deaf-mute at Zakopanje Porto rage and Varna.

Since 1955 the Bulgarian Union of Deaf-Mutes has been member of the World Federation of Deaf-Mutes. One of its representatives was elected in the leading body of the Federation. The Union is also member of the International Silent Sports Committee and of the International Chess Committee. It maintains lively contacts with kindered organizations in the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Italy, Hungary, the German Democratic Republic, Yugoslavia, etc. Bulgarian tourists pay visits to their friends in Poland and the German Democratic Republic, and receive visitors from those countries. The football teams of Bulgarian deaf-mutes often play matches with teams from abroad.

The deaf-mutes are respected citizens of Bulgaria. They enjoy the reputation of being proverbially diligent and eager to learn. A great number of them are graduates of secondary schools and higher educational institutions. There are deaf-mutes engineers, chemists, doctors, agronomists, park builders, biologists, economists and artists in Bulgaria. Exhibitions of the works of deaf-mutes are periodically held in the country, all achievements of the deaf-mutes are duly marked in the press and magazines and every personal and collective manifestation of talent on their part is warmly welcomed by Bulgarian public opinion.