

The National Cripples' Organization

An introduction to the cripples' own organization in Sweden

(this article was published in the Journal Svensk vanföretidskrift. Vol 40 (1963), pp. 5-6)

By Editor Erik Nilsson

The National Cripples' Organization (De vanföras riksorganisation – DVR) is an association of cripples and those interested in their welfare. The original association, from which the National Organization has developed, was founded at Gothenburg in 1923 by Anna Vogel, who as at that time principal of the Gothenburg Cripple Institute. The concentrated aims and tasks of the association are stated in the first of the association's statutes, which reads: "The purpose of the association is to organize the cripples and those interested on their behalf, into a nationwide organization which shall seek to promote the cripples' interests".

That the importance of their own organisations is now evident to cripples has been proved of recent years, and during the last decade the association has made great progress. Through the association the cripples have greater opportunity to get a hearing and to have their proposals and claims placed before the right authority. The National Cripples' Organization now represents a definite welfare group in the community.

The association's supreme ruling authority is the congress, which is summoned every third year. The congress elects the board, which consists of 7 persons, who in their turn select an executive committee of 3 members. The association's office and official secretary are in Stockholm.

Ever since it was founded in 1923 the association has had its own paper; this has meant a great deal to the success of the work. The Swedish Cripple Magazine has followed the development of the association in a commendable way and has become a forum where the varied problems of cripple welfare are brought up for discussion and dealt with in a factual and reliable way. To the members especially, the paper has meant a great deal, as they have been able to discuss common problems in their own journal.

One of the chief tasks of the organization is to interest the members in general and association questions. Special interest is devoted to study activity and vocational training. The members can obtain scholarships from the stipendiary fund for theoretical and practical supplementary training in various trades, for travel scholarships, and for attendance at the people's high schools and other similar courses.

In addition, the association organizes a number of social courses, which undoubtedly fulfil a useful purpose. Local branch officials and other interested members come to these courses to obtain factual information on social-political questions. The courses

are also intended to spur the members to active work. The result is shown to a certain extent by the fact that there are now over 40 local branches throughout the country.

It has always been the desire of the National Organization to take an active part in the public work of cripple welfare.

At the present time, DVR is represented in the Swedish Cripple Welfare's Central Committee (Svenska Vanförevärdens Centralkommitté), the central organisation for cripple welfare in Sweden, and is a member of the Joint Committee for the Partially Disabled, which is composed of representatives from the Association of the Blind, the National Consumptives' Association, the Society for the Promotion of Hearing, and the National Cripples' Organization. The Joint Committee is working for social support measures and improved legislation for various invalid groups.

Among the questions that have long been a part of the association's programme, is the work of convalescent homes. Those who need to convalesce and benefit by the sun and bathing, can do so at the Sommarsol convalescent home at Vejbystrand, on the West Coast, and the open-air home, Dellenborg, at Delsbo In Hälsingland. There are 100 beds at Sommarsol, and 35 Dellenborg. The homes are very much frequented. A considerable sum is distributed annually towards free beds and travelling expenses for the patients with small means. Convalescent-care gets valuable economic support from the cripples' Christmas magazine and the cripples' lottery, the proceeds of which very largely go to this work.

The State grants a subsidy for physiotherapy to Sommarsol, and the county councils and towns outside the council areas give a grant for expenses, usually at the rate of 2 kronor per person per day.

Since the organization has been brought under the authority of the state departments as far as cripple-welfare questions are concerned, more work has obviously been devoted to social problems. For some years now, a number of special committees have been working on the investigation or solution of current problems for cripples.

Next on the agenda, is the desire to found a colony for cripple children. Plans have been drawn up and there is a building site already available at Vejbystrand. During the past two summers, more provisional children's colonies have been arranged.

The National Cripples' Organization has had increasingly important work to do. The cripples have also shown themselves willing to assist activity in the solving of many problems connected with Swedish cripple welfare. The members are fully aware that the organization alone cannot solve big problems; and also that big problems cannot be solved without everyone's co-operation.

Work and responsibility accompany the undertakings. Interested and efficient officials – trained in the practical work of an association and with insight into general affairs – are necessary in order to meet the increased demands. It is just as important for private members to take an active part in the work, which must promote good comradeship, support the weak, and create conditions which increase self-esteem and give the individual a broader outlook on life.