

INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE FOR PEACES

SERVICE CIVIL
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FREIWILLIGER
ZIVILDienst



NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
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TELEPHONE 23650

Please reply to: -
D. L. Sainty
Relief Section 109
British Red Cross
B. A. O. R.
18th November 1945

Dear Derek,

Report 30

Enclosures :

(1)

(2)

(3) A note handed to Marian one morning this week before the daily flow of refugees etc. started, by a man who presumably lives near the frontier, in the following terms :

"Different German together with me want to thank you very much for the service which you do for our wounded soldiers and the old men and women"

Signature indecipherable

(4)

Our Job :

The unsettled feeling in the team consequent on the anticlimax of expecting an urgent emergency job and not finding it is gradually disappearing as we are fitting into more or less regular and settled jobs, of which the main one is the transport from the frontier to the camp. We are hoping to extend this by making runs daily with the Ambulances twelve kilometres or so into the Russian zone to pick up cases; it was all arranged yesterday, but this morning doubts have assailed the officers, and higher authority is being sought, whether from Stalin himself or only Shukow we are not sure.

The manner in which the transfer of population between the Russian and British zones is operating is extremely curious. In the first place it seems to have been accepted by the intelligent leaders of making that it would be possible to avoid all intercourse between the zones. Time has worked its miracle, and now some intercourse is provided for, but the problem is that the people are inclined to go their own way rather than fit in with the plans designed for them.

There are only one or two official crossing points - Besenhausen being one of them - and the "Green Frontier" is still regularly crossed in spite of official warnings and the risk of being shot at.

Besenhausen did canalise the traffic in this part of the world for a time, and still draws to it most of those desirous of crossing, because they know, for one thing, that there are some facilities there. But it only needs a hitch in the arrangements to increase the traffic of the Green Frontier, and the hitches are occurring. This week the Russians have been turning back some people desiring to go east, because they could not prove they lived in the Russian zone; and this morning a band of 50 to 60 people came past here on the way to cross the frontier at Bremke, which is still unofficial. Besenhausen again, is an exchange point - i. e. the agreement is that a head for head exchange of people at the frontier is allowed.

The people coming this way are methodically registered (though a large number still contrive to avoid registration) but the figures derived from this registration must be a very inaccurate guide to the movement of population for the reason that 90% of those going east are going to bring goods and relatives and come out again. This the Russians are now trying to stop, and are claiming the right to turn people back, as they have done this week. BAOR however denies that they have this right, the agreement having been a simple head-for-head affair with no trimmings. Conferences are now going on to try to settle this, but if it is not settled, and the Russians persist in turning people back, the British authorities are not going to lie down under it, and are intending to allow into their zone only a similar number to that let through by the Russians into theirs. Now observe. This will not result in a cutting down of the traffic both ways to, say, 1500 a day. It may cut it down a bit, but the more intransigent will come and go through the Green Frontier, thus causing a little more work for a precisely similar result. The British authorities say this will go on until the Russians come to their senses, which, as it hurts us possibly more than it hurts them, may not be all at once. One result of all this is that we have been asked to take over a part of the new Friedland camp (which is not yet ready for full operation) as a dormitory camp for people turned back. We are hoping that this will not come off, but if it does we shall have to be prepared for people piling up in the camp, in spite of the efforts which will be made to disperse them. The word 'Belsen' has already been on our lips.

We were visited yesterday by a Salvation Army laddie who is doing a Refugee survey for Col. Agnew, and he said that the people coming through here were on the whole in much better condition than those further north. Those running the Green Frontier are usually worse off than the official transferees, and have sometimes been subjected to ill treatment - presumably by semi-bandits. Refugees proper are still not coming through here in any number, though there is a steady, small daily increase in the proportion.

The confusion in the general situation may be illustrated by two comments :

(1) my last week's report on our old job - that all the Poles were being cleared out - has now to be cancelled. Protests have been successful in preventing the total evacuation of that area.

2) it has only recently been realised that people coming from the east into this zone bring money with them, a good deal of it military currency printed by the Russians. The latter may be printing without reserve - they say here that they are - so that if the movement of people goes on for a long time it may affect the economic state of the British zone. At the moment the Russian notes (which are similar to the British except for the numbering) are being withdrawn at the Banks, but obviously that might eventually cause considerable dislocation unless new British notes were printed merely for the purpose of covering the others.

AGM :

I hope to enclose a message from Unit to AGM.

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All the best,
Yours,

David

MESSAGE FOR THE AGM

First with the Dutch, then with the Poles, now with the Germans and always nearer the heart of the problem. Every day now we try in a small way to assist the thousands of folk trudging over the border from the Russian zone with their little handtrucks hopelessly overloaded with the few possessions they have been able to save.

Seeing all this suffering makes us hope most sincerely that in conference together you will be able to plan measures to succour the people of Europe and to create a better spirit among the nations.

Amitiés,
Unit 4