

MY MEMORIES OF THE FORMATION OF I.Z.D.

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My memories of the formation of the German branch of S.C.I. are linked with an earlier I.V.S.P. memory. During the raids on London I.V.S.P. started a civilian relief service in the London East End ("Tunmarsh Lane"). One night we asked all the officials and local people with and for whom we worked to spend an evening with us and I remember the leader of the service, Bernard Pike, making a short speech in which he explained the ideas behind the movement. He assured our guests that when the War was over, S.C.I. would be organising services in Great Britain and in Europe hoping to repair the destruction caused by War. He said that on these services they would find working alongside British and other volunteers German members of the movement. Earlier that evening we had heard the sound of British bombers making for the coast and later the sound of German bombers and British fighters overhead. It was a little difficult even for those of us in I.V.S.P. to believe at that moment unreservedly in the future of S.C.I.; and by their expressions, our guests, although tolerant, found it next to impossible.

Nevertheless, later, when I.V.S.P. became a member of the Council of British Societies for Relief Abroad (C.O.B.S.R.A.), and with other (bigger and more widely known) voluntary societies, had the opportunity of doing civilian relief work overseas, it was always clear from the outset that I.V.S.P. hoped that one of the indirect results of this work might be leaving behind in the countries in which it worked, branches of S.C.I. that would continue to provide opportunities for service for the citizens of those countries. It was equally clear, however, that the relief work itself the reason for our teams to be sent abroad and it was clearly not undertaken because it was a means of getting "a foot in the door". No plans were laid in advance as to how branches might be formed and the way in which I.Z.D. came about provided us who saw these events take place from behind the I.V.S.P. Foreign Service office in London, with a touch of dramatic surprise.

It is, however, a story that starts well before our teams reached Germany. To be allowed by the Government to work abroad in those days it was essential to be elected a member of C.O.B.S.R.A. I.V.S.P. in resources and membership must have been one of the smallest bodies to apply. Not only that, but it was a "peace" movement, and in the middle of a War, it would I think have been understandable had I.V.S.P. been regarded by the authorities and C.O.B.S.R.A. as too "uncertain" an element to be elected. I always feel that the fact that I.V.S.P. was elected is a tribute not only to the respect that must have been won through the pre-War services of S.C.I. (particularly the relief work in Spain, but also to the tolerance and breadth of view displayed by existing C.O.B.S.R.A. members. We can say perhaps therefore that I.Z.D. has had the assistance of all pre-War members in its formation because if we had not got into C.O.B.S.R.A., we would never have got into Germany for a long time after the War.

But even after we were in C.O.B.S.R.A. we did not get so easily into Europe. Towards the end of 1942, C.O.B.S.R.A. was asked to prepare teams for work in the Middle East among refugees, and it was expected that the teams would then go on to work in Greece, Jugo-Slavia and Italy, when the military situation allowed.

For some long time I.V.S.P. had its first team selected and standing by, and it was satisfactory that I.V.S.P. was one of the Societies asked to send out volunteers in the first wave. All preparations at this time had to be made under strict security precautions, and there were only three of us who said good-bye to our first team at midnight February 19th, 1942, as the team members climbed aboard Army lorries outside the I.V.S.P. office in Deans Yard, Westminster. This was the team which under Willy Begert worked for a long time in Greece. During the next 18 months we sent out two further relief teams and of these one worked in Crete and later Patras and the other in Italy and from their work stemmed later the Italian branch. It may still be possible — as indeed we hope — that we shall see an active Greek branch of S.C.I.

These teams did not exhaust the stock of suitable volunteers for relief work, but it did well might exhaust our very limited funds. Although we had organised a fairly successful public appeal, and many facilities were given to the teams by the authorities, there were many heavy expenses involved which fell to us to pay, and we had nearly 40 volunteers in the field.

I think it will be understood that although I.V.S.P. took the view that it should send its teams where the authorities felt they were most needed and not choose where it should do its service (unlike some volunteers!) everyone was looking to the day when the contacts we had had in Europe could be renewed and enlarged. Particularly was it hoped that there would be an opportunity to work in Germany. At last came the day when the Government intimated to C.O.B.S.R.A. that it should prepare for a request for teams to be sent to "North West Europe". I.V.S.P. was asked if it could supply a team.

The Foreign Service Sub-Committee met and considered at length what our answer should be. From every angle it was discussed and every time we came to the same conclusion — we had the volunteers but we had not sufficient funds. In fact unless a promised new Government grant was soon forthcoming, we were going to be very hard-pressed to keep out the teams we had already sent. We reported this to the National Committee, and they too could see no other course but to accept this position. Regretfully, C.O.B.S.R.A. was informed that while we hoped a further chance would come later, with great regret we must decline this one.

That, we thought sadly, was the close of that particular episode. But then came the first of several interventions from outside our own ranks, and which played a very decisive role in speeding the day of I.Z.D.'s birth.

W.D.Hogarth, the Secretary of C.O.B.S.R.A., who was always a very good friend of I.V.S.P. in numerous ways, rang up and asked if we could see him. I well remember walking round with John Wheeler to his office, and when we got there, it appeared that we had not heard the last of our "European team". Mr. Hogarth told us that he appreciated the reasons for our decision, but he wanted to ask our Committee to reconsider it. He told us that the teams in the Middle East had impressed many with their work and personal qualities in the field. It was felt, he said, that I.V.S.P. teams could be relied upon to remain teams, even when pressures and difficulties were upon them. He told us that while C.O.B.S.R.A. were in no difficulty in raising the requisite number of teams asked for from among its members, he hoped personally that there would be at least one I.V.S.P. team in the first batch, and could we not again go into the possibility of raising the money.

I think that as we walked back to the I.V.S.P. office, John and I knew for certain that faced with this encouragement and challenge, somehow or another money would be forthcoming. In fact it was. There were long-distance 'phone-calls to Leeds to John Harvey and Donald Bentley and an emergency Executive meeting, and in a matter of days enough funds had been guaranteed by I.V.S.P. members and friends to tide us over and we told C.O.B.S.R.A. that after all we could accept the invitation.

Unit 4 — a team full of character and as early I.Z.D. members will know "characters" — was assembled. Soon it left England and before the end of the War was working in Holland, where it encountered by utter chance the coincidence of being stationed in Bilthoven, where S.C.I. was founded. From Holland it soon moved into Germany and its reports were read with increasing interest by those of us at home. The most exciting report was that telling of unofficial work camp that they were going to organise at Friedland and that some German students were going to take part. We were not surprised at that particular team getting a work camp organised, nor that they were doing it "unofficially". The camp duly took place and appeared to be very successful. It had a sequel.

In the sequel we in the London office found ourselves to a slight extent involved. We had heard from David Sainty that a Control Commission Officer, Colonel Alan Andrews, with whom they had been in touch and who had special responsibility for Youth Affairs in Germany had seen something of the unofficial work camp in Friedland and wished to come to the I.V.S.P. office when he was next in London on leave.

A few weeks later Col. Andrews duly rang us up and arranged to come the next day. We took the opportunity of inviting Mr. Hogarth to come as well. Col. Andrews duly arrived and explained to us that he had seen in the Friedland experiment something that he felt was of great value. He would like to see international work camps recognised in Germany and wanted I.V.S.P. to be given permission to organise them. He explained to us that this however might not be so easy for of course at that time everything was rigidly controlled and regulated. It would require, he said, a decision by the Minister in charge of German affairs, but he thought that if we wrote to the Minister, it was possible that our request might be referred to Col. Andrews in Germany for his advice.

There and then with help from Mr. Hogarth a letter was drafted and later sent. Thus it was a second outside intervention was successful in helping the formation of I.Z.D. Col. Andrews was asked his advice about the possibility of giving I.V.S.P. official sanction to run four work camps that summer, and he strongly advised the Minister to give his permission. Which he duly did.

Not only was the bare permission granted, but very valuable facilities were given to I.V.S.P. I never met Pierre Ceresole, but I suspect from all accounts, that he would have derived great satisfaction from the fact that for nearly two years every volunteer leaving London for Germany to take part in I.V.S.P.

(or, as they soon become, I.Z.D.) services, went at the expense of the War office, and travelled on military trains and ships. And during the Berlin blockade, an I.V.S.P. service was enabled to take place according to schedule, because the rations were flown in by the R.A.F.

Through the good offices of the authorities, volunteers coming from countries other than Britain were given free transport from the camps to the German frontier and I believe that the first Germans to enter a number of foreign countries after the War were I.Z.D. volunteers who had been given permits to take part in S.C.I. camps. Such co-operation and help was very warming.

Later we were to see and experience the quality and the positive contribution made to S.C.I. as a whole by our German members. The German branch has brought much new life to our movement.

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