

I.V.S.P. Summer Camp Aug 5th - Sept 29th 1946
KÖHLBRAND BEI HAMBURG

- R e p o r t -

VOLUNTEERS

The total number of volunteers who served at the camp was 82, 19 of whom were women and 63 men. About two thirds of the total was composed of students of one kind or another. There were only 4 non-Germans, one American and 3 British. The periods of service varied from two or three days to the entire eight weeks. Ages ranged from 16 to 54 in the case of the men and from 18 to 49 in the case of the women. There were very many applications from young women which had to be refused on account of the available places already been filled.

THE JOB

The camp was located at the sandy beach on the banks of the river Elbe, this beach being used as a daily playground for 400 - 500 children. The children came each morning by steamer from Hamburg accompanied by teachers and other helpers, at about 9,30 a.m. and returned in the late afternoon about 5 p.m. On arrival in the morning ersatz coffee was served with which the children ate their own bread or other food; at midday a meal of hot soup was provided, followed by a sweat soup of biscuits etc. in the afternoon before departure. The children gave up some food coupons for these meals, and the whole arrangement was made by the workers welfare organisation 'The Arbeiter Wohlfahrt', in cooperation with the education authorities. In former times a much larger number of children had benefited by these arrangements, somewhere about 2000. During recent years however, one of the large wooden halls which served as shelter for the children in wet weather, and also as a dining hall, had been completely wrecked by local people in search of wood for fuel; furthermore a large quantity of sand from the beach had been piled up by wind and weather against the buildings at the rear of the beach, and at the back of the beach itself. This sand movement greatly restricted the extent of beach available for the children, the underlying mud being dirty and dangerous.

The job mainly consisted in clearing this accumulated sand from around the buildings, and moving it forwards on the beach, leaving the site as level as possible. Then work on the beach itself designed to produce a gentle slope towards the water, and to fill in as far as possible one very deep bay. The sand was shovelled into iron trucks holding about 1/2 ton, and running on iron rails. The work was heavy but clean, and the environment very pleasant. During pauses for lunch and beverages it was a matter of some difficulty to restrain over enthusiastic youngsters from running away with the shovels.

There were also a number of trees which required lopping in order to let in a little more light and air, and the wood so acquired was sawn and chopped to suitable size for use as firewood. Some of this wood was used as fuel in our own small kitchen during the scheme.

A mistake was made in removing too much sand from the roots of a line of poplar trees, resulting in the fall of about four of them during periods of strong wind. These fallen trees were also sawn up. It had been thought that the sand had gathered only during the last ten years or so, and that the trees, at least fifteen years old, were rooted in good earth. Subsequently it became apparent that the trees were only rooted in the sand. The work occupied the whole period of 8 weeks, and a little further time could have been spent on tree lopping.

No figures as to the actual weight of sand moved are available; but those volunteers and others who saw both the completed work and the original state of the beach were satisfied that a very useful job had been done.

ACCOMODATION

Two rooms were placed at our disposal by the 'Arbeiter Wohlfahrt' each of these already had a cold shower and washing trough with three cold taps. One was used as a bedroom for the women, the other for the men. Electric light was not at first available, and some windows were missing.

The windows were fitted later in time for the cold mornings and evenings, and the electric light was installed fairly early both in the bedrooms and in our small kitchen. Wooden double bunks were obtained in sections loaned by the 'Jugendamt', and also a cooking stove from the same source.

The supply of blankets was sufficient, that of straw sacks for palliasses about 10 short; deficiency made good by sewing up the required number of blankets. When stuffed with straw these served the purpose, but were rather narrow to be very comfortable. The men's bedroom was rather too small to accommodate twenty men, the maximum number allowed for; the women's bedroom was quite satisfactory, taking a maximum of eight beds. About half way through the scheme a third room was placed at our disposal for use as a dining and day room. Formerly all meals had been taken in the open before the kitchen, the weather being good, later the day room was much used for the purpose and for evening activities.

Supply of tools and crockery etc. was quite adequate.

EXPENSES

All expenses of the actual scheme were completely met by money raised locally; a surplus of approximately 517 RM remained against total claims for travelling expenses of 926,95 RM. It is hoped to cover this prospective deficit from local sources.

ORGANISATION

An English sister was in charge of the kitchen and responsible for the allocation of food supplies, the women volunteers cooked all meals with the exception of breakfast (when no cooking was required) and the midday meal.

Breakfast duty involving an 'early rise' was done on a rota including all personnel, two volunteers being liable each day. This duty also involved washing up after the evening meal. This was put forward in the first instance as a suggestion only, and endorsed by all, not without some misgivings on the part of the men. The midday meal was drawn from the large kitchen where food for the children was prepared, women volunteers often helped with preparation of vegetables for the large kitchen. Also those able to do so did some work in the sand.

There was a permanent German volunteer entrusted with the preliminary arrangements, and responsible for all relations with the various German offices and authorities.

The life of the camp was conducted as far as possible on a democratic basis, full opportunity being afforded for discussions of internal affairs, the voicing of complaints, criticisms and suggestions at a weekly meeting. At this meeting a representative was elected to attend the forthcoming conference on the development of I.V.S.P. in Germany to be held in the winter. The voting was at first done by nomination of candidates and show of hands. Later without nominations and by secret ballot.

A programme of discussions and social activities was drawn up by the volunteers themselves at the beginning of each week, covering all the evenings and the week-end leisure time. Attendance at discussions and participation in excursions etc. was entirely optimal; notwithstanding most people did attend.

The leader's function was chiefly that of exercising a little guidance, and included the keeping of records and relations with British Military Govt. officials.

LEISURE

During the evenings many subjects were discussed; sometimes an interesting visitor was present to introduce a subject or to relate some experience of general interest. One evening per week was devoted to the business meeting, and another evening usually included some account of the origins and development of I.V.S.P. Towards the end of the first month it became usual to secure tickets for theatre or cinema for Saturday or Sunday early in each week. Volunteers were able to choose their own films or plays, and paid for their own tickets.

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Esperanto was well for the fore, subjects discussed included the following:

- a) Life in England before and during the war.
- b) American life and politics today.
- c) The attempted overthrow of the Nazi Regime in July 1944.
- d) English politics.

- e) Conditions in internment camps under the British occupation of Germany.
- f) Conditions of true greatness.
- g) Newspaper production.
- h) Food.
- i) Quakerism.
- j) German Peace Movement.

British newspapers and some periodicals were available in the day room, also Swiss books and periodicals and usually the current issue of 'Die Welt'. Bulletins from the I.V.S.P International Secretariat were also available for all to read, sometimes in both English and German.

Excursions were made to Stade at the invitation of the Hamburg 'Good Templers', to the Hamburg Zoo, and also to St. Michaels House at Blankenese. This last in a large country house where courses of ten days' duration are held for young Germans, the courses are intended to make clear the essentials of Christianity without any doctrinal bias, and are arranged by the Church of England. Intake is evenly divided between those who profess Christianity and those who most certainly do not.

DIFFICULTIES

The chief material difficulty was undoubtedly the food question. Experience at this camp leads to the conclusion that the German heavy worker's ration, unsupplemented from black market or other source, is not sufficient to enable a man to do really heavy work.

Some difficulty was caused by the high proportion of students from Göttingen who attended the camp in some weeks. Most of these were ex-army officers, having a very definite military background, and they tended at first to be very critical of everything (perhaps by comparison with Friedland standards ?) and sometimes hostile. At first they tended to form a kind of Göttingen block, voting together and reluctant to mix with the others. This tendency was usually broken down by mid-week and by the end of the week quite a good team spirit had been established. Probably some of these came expecting good food and with no higher motives, but not of course all.

It is desirable in future that every effort be made to secure volunteers from all sections of the population, so that the new movement here in Germany may not be overweighed by any one section of society.

The presence of more volunteers from foreign lands is also very desirable and necessary, although this could hardly be expected at the present time when there are so many difficulties in the way of travel between different countries.

SUGGESTIONS AND COMMENTS

The weekly meetings produced the following constructive proposals :

- 1) That the study of Esperanto be encouraged officially by I.V.S.P. among its members, in view of the obvious usefulness of such an international language to those serving international work schemes.
- 2) That every consideration be given to the early organisation of work camps wholly or mainly for young women, this on account to the large numbers of young women in Germany who are willing to serve and the very small number who have been able to do so this summer.

My own feeling is that in the case of many of the volunteers who attended the Hamburg camp some impression has been made and that our ideas have gained a foothold as it were. If these camps can be followed up fairly quickly by others or at least by some other form of activity then this foothold may be consolidated and I.V.S.P. may gain some sound supporters. Failing this, the likelihood is that the impact of our ideas will fail to produce any lasting effect.

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Difficulties in regard to financial and catering arrangements at work schemes are less likely to arise if two people cooperate in each field - perhaps a rule might be made to this effect.

It is very difficult to assess a person's character and the extent of his enthusiasm for international ideas on the strength of one week's service together, in my opinion a minimum period of service of fourteen days should be aimed at.

With regard to the selection of German leaders for future work camps in Germany great caution should be exercised, it might be desirable to retain leadership in the hands of non-German nationals for the next year, except when suitable German persons, having served a satisfactory period of service with I.V.S.P. abroad, are available. The more truly international the camps, the less is the danger of their becoming perverted.

Those volunteers from the Hamburg camp living locally expressed a wish to form a 'local group' and to meet at regular intervals for discussion and for the planning of practical activities. Heinrich Carstens was appointed convenor of this group.

Harry Alcock