

Summary of I.V.S.P. international work camps activities in the British Zone of Germany

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(Given at Team Leaders Conference, HQ 5, 19th November, 1946)

This last summer, with the approval of Military Government, I.V.S.P. ran four work schemes in the British Zone. These run for an average of seven weeks. About 25 people worked at a time on each scheme. Two or three British members of I.V.S.P. were on each scheme, including the leader who in each case was a member of one of the relief teams. There was also a tiny sprinkling of other nationalities.

The volunteers, German, British and others, lived and worked under the same simple conditions, doing jobs of essential practical manual work.

The Mil Gov authorities were very favourably impressed and our belief that one of the best ways of getting to know people well in a limited time is to work alongside them on a practical job was amply confirmed.

As a result, a conference was held at Hannover towards the end of October which was attended by delegates from each "week" on the schemes, by other German people specially interested in I.V.S.P. (e.g. former members of the organisation), and by members of British relief teams. Two members of the Swiss I.V.S.P. relief team working at Saarbrücken were also present and the meeting was presided over by the International Secretary, Willy Begert, a Swiss member who was formerly leader of a British I.V.S.P. relief team in Greece.

At this meeting a working committee was elected which included two British I.V.S.P. members and which is about to put in a request for recognition to the Allied Control Authority and to the Military Governments of the four Zones. The Committee is anxious to take over the organisation of German schemes at Easter and during the summer of 1947. In the meantime, the I.V.S.P. Relief Teams are continuing to organise until the German Committee is able to take over.

It is hoped to run two schemes early in January, each of which will be manned by approximately 18 volunteers. It is hoped that half of these will be I.V.S.P. members from Denmark, Holland, Switzerland, Norway, France, Belgium, USA and Britain. The half will consist of German volunteers who have already served. Although they have not been actually told, the idea is largely to provide an opportunity of selecting possible German leaders of future schemes.

One of these schemes will run at Duisburg and will probably last ten days. The job is likely to take the form of preparing ground to be used as a kitchen garden for a children's hospital. The town authorities will provide accommodation and tools and it is hoped that the house where the volunteers will live will eventually be used as an old people's home.

The second scheme will run in the Schleswig area, where wood will be cut on the mainland for refugees living on the small island of Amrum.

We have been very much encouraged by the way in which the idea is working out and by the very considerable interest shown in it by the Education Officers of Military Government. It is common knowledge to those who have worked with young people in Germany that they are profoundly suspicious of anything which might be interpreted as mere propaganda; but the experience of these work schemes goes to show that they will make a ready response to a more practical approach.

Douglas Sowerby