

SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN SCHEME

Jan 1 to 10, 1947

At Flensburg-Weiche within 6 miles of the Danish border IVSP held an international "pick and shovel" scheme. Volunteers and sisters were from Germany 11, England 3, Switzerland 2, Holland 1, Norway 1, Denmark 1, Sweden 1. The group were housed in part of disused Luftwaffe officers' mess - a fine building which owing to lack of attention, had become very dilapidated. Radiators had burst through freezing, and the water had to be turned off. In the first days of the scheme water had to be carried from the refugee barracks amongst which the building was situated. RS/109/IVSP had made all the preliminary arrangements and all equipment for sleeping and kitchen quarters was brought by them.

The work engaged upon was the felling of trees to be sawn into metre lengths and stacked. These were then loaded into Lorries which transported their loads to the coast where they were shipped to the islands off the N.W. of Germany for the use of refugees. The working day commenced at 8 a.m. and volunteers were taken to the job in the Unit ambulance driven by Stan or Margaret. Back to billets for mid-day meal at 12.30 and from 1.30 to 4.30 on the job again. In the afternoon each of the sisters in turn came into the forest and did most of the jobs the men were doing. The weather was extremely cold and on one afternoon, work was carried out in a snow storm. The hard work however, enabled the volunteers to keep warm and much the coldest work was back at the billets where the sisters were preparing meals in a large icy cold Kitchen with a stone floor and tiled walls. Cut wood from the job was purchased, for the kitchen use, but as it was 'green' much difficulty in keeping fires alight was occasioned. It was possible to dry some of the wood from day to day in the kitchen oven. The bedrooms were also very cold, but Canadian stoves had been fitted in some of the rooms and volunteers on one side of the building were able to keep fires going on dead branches brought back from the woods each day.

The evenings were very full, and Ralph Hegnauer the Swiss leader of the group had called together an international committee at the commencement of the scheme, to prepare a programme for after work activities. There was one evening set aside for discussions on Germany and the future. One evening for talks and discussion by German members of the different zones on conditions in their various parts. These discussions were most useful, but many questions put up could not be answered because of lack of time. Translations more than halved the time at our disposal. Non-Germans were extremely interested on hearing about the past in Germany, and wanted reasons for the allowance of the continuance of the state of affairs which existed. Tickets were obtained for the opera at Flensburg, and two-thirds of the group went to hear 'Fidelio' - a good performance in an icy cold theatre. On another evening a visit was paid by the Landrat for Südtondern (equiv. to a County Major) along with the Chief Refugee Officer for the area. An interesting talk was heard on the history of the district, its geographical peculiarities and its refugee problems. The volunteers were interested in the subjects and raised queries on the Danish minority question in the district. The municipal authorities in the vicinity were quite keen to know about IVSP.

One evening was devoted to a gramophone concert conducted by Stan. Some volunteers staying up late to take advantage of the very fine selection of recordings at our disposal. One house meeting was held during which most of the working arrangements were made. The first Sunday saw the group on a visit to Glücksburg right on the border, and from there on to the Flensburg Fjord, on the opposite side of which is Denmark. Table Tennis was a feature in the evenings at the commencement of the scheme, but was not given much attention latterly. The whole scheme ended on the Saturday evening with a party, at which over 50 people were present. Amongst those present were Derek Edwards, Foreign Service Secretary, out from England on a survey of the Relief teams; Basil Eastland, Senior representative in Germany, and responsible for the operation of the two New Year schemes in Germany; the IVSP Anglo-German International discussion group (11 members) who want to start a local IVSP group; the Red Cross Liaison Officer, Miss Rosemary Deane; the Public Health Officer for Schleswig-Holstein; several German Youth Leaders, and Organisers; the Landrat for Flensburg Kreis, who went on from the party to a Youth Club conference, and said he would talk to them about IVSP work; the chief town clerk of the city of Flensburg.

The Earl of Buckingham who was prevented from coming because another engagement is interested in the work and wants to be fully informed. He is (British) Youth Officer for Schleswig-Holstein. At the

end of the scheme Brig. Gen. Vicary, Head of British Military Government in the district, visited the premises.

It was apparent from the beginning that the relationship between the members of the various nations would be excellent, and it continued throughout the scheme. It was arranged as far as possible that a German and a non-German should share in a room, and that a similar combination be adopted on the job. This worked very well. The Germans were particularly keen to hear what other nations thought of them, and it was discovered that members of the countries which had been occupied by the Germans had most to say about the feelings of their people towards Germany. It was most interesting to hear conversations for example, between a soldier who had been 5 years in the German army of occupation in Norway, and a Norwegian who had been an Army Officer fighting the Germans. The key word of the whole scheme was friendliness. The Scandinavians had brought food and clothes for the Germans, and the standard of food on the scheme was rather higher than usual on IVSP projects.

Through the volunteers' efforts 152 cubic metres of wood were cut. The forester in charge of the woods where the trees were felled, said it was more than he had expected from an unskilled team. Actually we had one skilled man, the Swedish volunteer, who was able to advise on the best methods of working.

At the final assembly, the leader invited suggestions and criticism. Very little was said except that there was general agreement that more projects of this type should take place. It was pointed out that too much attention had been paid to the preparation of the food, which had necessitated the use of too many sisters in the kitchen. The leader commented on the unpunctuality generally, but was not exacting on this point remembering the many difficulties with the weather conditions, and lack of amenities on the scheme, such as water and light deficiencies

My impressions of the Germans as IVSP volunteers and potential leaders are rather hard to define because as comrades they were without exception, excellent fellows, hard workers, and keen on efficiency. However, I gathered from the discussions and private conversations, that their approach to Peace was much different from the normal IVSP approach, one finds in England. Their personal ideals are basically much the same as ours, but their attitude to frontiers is much deeper than ours. For example there is open hostility to the Russians, most of them having fought in Russia, and have knowledge of the Russian people, and their habits. The fact that parts of Germany have been taken over by other nations causes them a good deal of hurt, and they consider that 'Peace' of 1870 to 1914 because of the power of Germany at that time, was a satisfactory one. I think they were quite impressed by the attitude of the non-German members towards them, and they are very much concerned about what the rest of the world thinks of them. I feel there is inferiority complex abounding.

In discussing IVSP some of the Germans thought that much more large scale propaganda means should be employed, and it was probably surprising for them to hear that IVSP did not consider it was an organisation which would set the world alight, and overnight change the conditions and attitudes of the peoples. It was pointed out that it was rather a witness of a faith.

There is a definite fear of Russia, and while they know that another war would probably mean the utter, and complete destruction of their country, I feel there is such a deep rooted hate, and fear of Russian communism, that a war between say America, and Russia would see them anxious to take part on the side of the 'Allies'. Generally speaking, I think they have not yet grown up, and are living way back in medieval ideas of courage on the battlefield. The spirit of swashbuckling lives on !

The above are my personal impressions formed after a few days only. They do not apply to every German on the scheme, but to the majority.

*Margaret Hickson (?)*