

INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE FOR PEACCE
I. V. S. P.

"PICK and SHOVEL" in GERMANY II
An account of the New-Year (1947) Work-camps

(A) BACKGROUND

In the spring of 1946, the 'International Voluntary Service for Peace', the British Branch of the 'Service Civil International' had three relief teams working under the British Red Cross (Civilian Relief) in Germany, helping displaced persons and German refugees. It was obvious to these workers that there were other needs besides the mere supplying of food, shelter and clothing, which these people, and especially the youth of Germany were lacking; they needed contact with the world outside Germany; they needed to be taught what democracy really meant; and they needed an outlet for their fast-dying idealism, and a glimpse of security and hope.

FIRST I.V.S.P. SERVICE

In March 46, three members of the relief team dealing with refugees near Göttingen volunteered to live and work on equal terms with some 14 German students, on the site of a new refugee transit camp. Together they erected eight huts, took down two more ready for a re-erection alongside the others, and carried out essential fencing and draining. This little community, united by the common desire to help the refugees, where German and English volunteers learnt to understand each other while they worked and shared their social life together, was so successful that the I.V.S.P. decided to organise five further work-camps in the summer of 1946, in Hamburg, Berlin, Rendsburg, the Ruhr, and near the Dutch border.

FURTHER CAMPS

With the help of the Education Branch of the Control Commission, who saw in these work projects a means of bringing young German people once again into contact with the outside world from which they had so long been cut off, some 200 German 14 British volunteers, men and women, worked and lived together during the months of August and September. The work done was of a hard, unskilled nature but of value to the community, - such as gathering peat and bundling faggots for old and sick people, clearing away the sand of years from a children's holiday-home - but work such as would not be done by ordinary paid labour. Both men and women worked outdoors, although the latter devoted the greater proportion of their time to cooking and household duties. A high standard of work was aimed at and a 48-hour working-week adhered to.

Each volunteer had to apply in writing on a special application form before being accepted. The schemes were organised on a democratic basis according I.V.S.P. tradition. The 'leader' and 'Head-sister' were appointed by I.V.S.P., and in the circumstances peculiar to the situation in Germany, they were British personnel with a considerable amount of experience of I.V.S.P. life and work. The function of the leader was to represent the volunteers, to assess their wishes and the "group-feeling" about questions of work and the use of leisure, to exercise a little guidance, to keep the records of the scheme, and to write reports on each of the individual volunteers. The function of the head-sister was to deal with all questions of food, to superintend in the kitchen and house, to assign duties to the other sisters and to look after as far as possible in co-operation with the leader the welfare and comfort of the volunteers.

The minimum of compulsory duties were assigned, such as rotas for certain duties; otherwise volunteers came forward to their own initiative. At the weekly "house-meetings" full opportunity was afforded for discussion of internal affairs and the voicing of complaints, criticism and suggestions. Leisure time was spent in organised discussions introduced by one of the volunteers or by a specially invited outsider; newspapers, periodicals and books in different languages were available; visits were paid to local places of interest; and there were entertainment's either "home-made" or entailing visits to local theatres etc. Participation was purely optional, but in fact, everyone joined in.

One of the most valuable results of this communal life was the gradual understanding which grew up between the volunteers, particularly with those from outside Germany; but in this respect the proportion of volunteers from abroad was much too low in these five services.

HANNOVER CONFERENCE

34 delegates to a projected conference had been elected, one to represent each week of the five summer services. Together with other German and English people, including representatives of the Control Commission and of the British Red Cross, they met in Hanover in October 46 to criticise the work-camps, examine the difficulties encountered, estimate the value of such work-schemes, and drew up plans for future work with the view to the possible formation of a German organisation similar to the British I.V.S.P. and, like it, affiliated to the 'Service Civil International'.

Under the chairmanship of the international Secretary of the 'Service Civil International' the conference decided to set up a loose organisation on the whole four zones of Germany, to call it "Internationaler Freiwilliger Dienst für den Frieden" and to apply for recognition of such an organisation to the Allied Control Authority. In order to carry this out, and to organise future international work-projects, an executive committee was elected. It was agreed to encourage the formation of local groups responsible for small local "spare-time" work-projects.

NEW-YEAR WORK-CAMPS

The executive committee decided to undertake the organising of international work-camps in Germany in the Easter and Summer of 1947. In order to give some of the most promising German volunteers a thorough background of I.V.S.P. ideals and tradition - a background which they would bring to the projected Easter and Summer schemes - it was decided that the British I.V.S.P. should organise two New Year camps which would be truly international in nature.

(B) NEW YEAR CAMP

1) LOCATION, DURATION AND SIZE

(a)		(b)	
<u>Duisburg (Ruhr)</u>		<u>Flensburg (Schleswig-Holstein)</u>	
1 - 12 Jan 47		1 - 12 Jan 47	
19 volunteers : 14 men; 5 women		20 volunteers : 15 men; 5 women	
of whom :		of whom :	
9 were German	6 men; 3 women	11 were German	8 men; 3 women
2 English	1 1	3 English	2 1
2 French	1 1	2 Swiss	1 1
2 Dutch	2	1 Dutch	1
2 Danish	2	1 Norwegian	1
1 Norwegian	1	1 Swedish	1
1 Swiss	1	1 Danish	1
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19	14 5	20	15 5
Age :	from 20 - 42; Average 27	Age :	from 20 - 50; Average 29
Occupation :	8 students 2 working-class 1 house-wife 8 various	Occupation :	7 students 6 working-class 2 house-wives 5 various
Leader :	Bruce Harrison	Leader :	Ralph Hegnauer
Head-Sister :	Connie Sowerby	Head-Sister :	Margaret Hickson

B (47 02 24 - 1 03)

2) THE WORK

(a) Duisburg

The work consisted in clearing a rough piece of ground behind a children's hospital, for use as the hospital's vegetable garden. After 2½ days, heavy frosts made further digging and uprooting of trees and bushes impossible, and for the rest of the working time the work consisted in wood-cutting, both for firewood for the town kitchen, and later, wood for furniture-making. The felling was done in a town wood adjacent to the house in which the volunteers lived, where many bomb-damaged trees had to be cleared. An average 7-hour working-day was adhered to; 11 men and 1 woman being on outside work each day : total 618 man/hours. 4 women and 1 man were, on the average, employed in the house. Illness and an accident meant that virtually one volunteer was off work all the time.

In such a devastated area as the Ruhr it was perhaps to be wondered at that no more urgent work had been found than digging a garden. But bearing in mind that the volunteers were unskilled, had no transport and were only available for ten days, the number of possible jobs was quite limited, and the urgency of using every available inch of German land for food production cannot be overlooked. Again, the wood-cutting made a valuable contribution to the lamentable fuel situation in the town, and was a job which owing to its heavy nature and the poverty of German rations other labour was unable to tackle.

3) FOOD

This looked like being a serious problem at first, But in fact the food was very good and plentiful; besides the German's being allowed to buy heavy-workers' rations, a generous ten-day ration brought with each of the volunteers who came from abroad added great variety to the pool. Indeed the criticism was heard that the food was too good for the simple standards at which I.V.S.P. aims.

4) LANGUAGE

Common - German; then - English; Dutch - quite popular; Danish and Norwegian - in an emergency! French - occasionally.

5) ACCOMMODATION

(a)
Duisburg

6 rooms in a large house, just derequisitioned, and awaiting conversion into an old people's home. Poor stoves, dirt, a completely frozen water-system and infrequent electricity were difficulties that had to be overcome.

(b) Flensburg

The work consisted in timber-felling on the mainland for refugee camps on the island of Amrum, itself without any fuel resources. During the nine working days, 154 round metres of fuel were cut, stacked and in part loaded and delivered. An average of 13 men and 1 woman were working outside every day : total 722 men/hours . Three women worked in the house and 1 man and 1 woman divided their time between the house and other necessary jobs. Illness accounted for 4 man/days being lost.

The nature of the job was completely satisfactory and of its necessary urgency there could be no doubt.

(b)
Flensburg

A brick building on the "Weiche" aerodrome, formerly an officers' mess. Poor stoves, poor fuel, severe weather which had frozen all pipes, and infrequent glimpses of electric light made living conditions very spartan. Much improvisation had to be undertaken.

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6) EQUIPMENT

(a) Duisburg

On loan from the German youth department of Duisburg, and supplemented by Relief Section 150 of Duisburg. Electric light bulbs from Denmark! Working clothes lent by Relief Section 150 and available for use of future work-camps. Tools supplied by the German parks authority.

(b) Flensburg

On loan from the army. Working-clothes, loaned to the German volunteers were brought by the volunteers from abroad for use on future work-camps. Tools were supplied by the German forestry authorities.

7) EXPENSES

(a) Duisburg

Cost of food and insurance borne by Duisburg town authorities. Foreign volunteers were insured by their respective national branches. Train fares of Germans not yet decided; foreign volunteers paid their own.

(b) Flensburg

Cost of Germans' food borne by British I.V.S.P. Foreign volunteers were insured by their respective national branches. Train fares of Germans not yet decided; foreign volunteers paid their own.

8) ORGANISATION

Some 34 German men and women from all four zones and Berlin, selected by the executive committee from reports made on their service during the summer, were invited to volunteer for the two work-schemes. 21 were able to volunteer; they were accepted; 1 failed to come. The 19 foreign volunteers were selected by their own national committees; invited by the British Red Cross (Civilian Relief) and the Education Branch of the Control Commission, to enter Germany; and permitted to travel by the Military Permit Office in the capital city of their country. Negotiations took on an average two months. Most arrived on civilian trains, but were able to return on military trains.

The function of the leaders and the head-sisters, appointed by I.V.S.P. before-hand, were as usual, co-ordinating, advising, representing the group, acting as chairman at the weekly "house-meeting", reporting on individuals at the end of the scheme and keeping the records of the service; whilst at the same time working on absolutely equal terms with the other volunteers.

It was desired that the minimum of compulsory "rota" duties should be assigned.

9) LEISURE TIME

In spite of fatigue, this was in the service very full; almost too crowded, though in view of the short duration of the schemes this was justified : organised discussions on "German problems", "Pacifism", "Reconstruction Problems in France, Switzerland, Holland and Denmark"; excursions and social visits, parties and contact with local youth groups, military government, town officials etc. Attendance at these and at the devotional meeting held on Sunday in Duisburg, was quite optional. In Duisburg every evening seemed to finish off with songs.

10) VISITORS

The schemes aroused a good deal of local interest, and the Mayor, Town Clerc, Town Youth Adviser, heads of local voluntary societies, Military Government Officers and members of various British Red Cross Relief Sections contacted the work-camps.

11) COMMENTS

Although not the majority, the Germans were naturally the largest contingent, but they carefully avoided forming a clique and were most anxious to see that our small working parties were truly international.

B (47 02 24 - 1 05)

12) CONCLUSION

(a) Duisburg

The international character of the service was of very great value. The exchange of ideas with people from other lands was a most worth-while experience for the German volunteers, whilst the foreign volunteers experience something no less deep in their contact with the different side of Germany for the first time for many years.

The work which was most satisfactory in itself, was enthusiastically carried out and a high standard maintained.

Leisure-time was most fruitfully employed, but still left time for personal contacts and exchange of ideas.

Altogether the spirit of both services was excellent and a little of the inspiration that each volunteer received will be taken back and spread among many different circles of friends over a very wide area. For the Germans, it has meant "that something had come true which we German dared not hope for years; young folk had come voluntarily to work with us, to help with the reconstruction of a new world". In this spirit they will go forward and organise their own schemes this spring and summer, guided and helped by the British I.V.S.P., and knowing that they are supported and encouraged by branches of the 'Service Civil International' in every land, for in those lands there are personal witnesses, returned from Flensburg and Duisburg bringing back the inspiration of these services with them.

HQ 5 British Red Cross,
(Civilian Relief)
(Vlotho) B.A.O.R. - Germany

(b) Flensburg

(a) Excellent though the output of timber undoubtedly was, there was a criticism expressed, (a hyper-criticism, perhaps) that if an expert had been working with the team, an even better result would have been obtained.

There was also a feeling that too high a proportion of the energies of the group had been expended upon looking after their living quarters, though this could hardly have been avoided.

(b) It was generally felt that the service was too short, though inevitably so, as they were planned to terminate as the University term re-opened.

(c) The problem of absorbing the high proportion of women volunteers on work-schemes remained un-tackled; even though one did work outside.

(d) Neither scheme was punctually on the job in the morning. This could have been improved.

(e) The importance of food and working-clothes cannot be over emphasised for future schemes.

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