

March 5. 1947

REPORT ON FREIBURG WORK CAMP

The Freiburg Work Camp was jointly organized by the Swiss and French branches of "Service Civil Volontaire International". The leader was a Swiss Ernst Hodel, a social worker by profession. The project was cutting and distributing wood to old people, invalids, families of POW, etc. in the city of Freiburg.

Originally proposed as a six week project, it was necessary to shorten it for four because the lack of funds with which to purchase food. Work in the wood began on February 3. and continued through February 28. Some 120 steeres (1 steer = 1 cubic meter) of wood were cut, of which 50 had been delivered to 100 families at the formal ending of the camp. A skeleton crew remaining hoped to distribute remaining wood during the first week of March if transport were available.

PERSONNEL

Camp strength varied between 20 and 27, fairly equally divided between Germans and "Ausländer". Of the foreigners there were 4 Swiss Volunteers (men-campers), 4 French; 1 Danish, 1 English and 1 from the United States. In addition to USA camper, there was someone from Quaker Freiburg team. There was one Swiss Sister (Woman camper). All of these campers, except the American had had several months service in one or more Service Civil Camps. Most had finished their studies and begun their "Métiers" or professions. The personnel and number of the German contingent varied considerably. Some 25 in all, there were no more than 15 and less than 8 at a time.

I.F.F. (Internationaler Freiwilliger Dienst für den Frieden), the German branch, sent 3 German campers from the British Zone, one man and two girls. These had been experienced in IVSP camps in Germany. All other Germans were from the French Zone. Most of these were from the University of Freiburg, or gymnasium in the city or environs. Two exceptions were a journalist and a book salesman. Except for the two girl students from the British Zone, none of the German campers stayed for the whole period. Usually it was two weeks and a few days, or for even shorter periods. The men had almost all seen service in the German Army and had been prisoners of war, mostly with the Americans. (More important for French and Germans to work together, than Americans - more misunderstanding. Hunger for outside contacts - Lost feeling of not knowing where is truth - No belief in National-Socialism or Democracy.)

WORK DAY AND THE WORK

The alarm went off at 6.45; breakfast was at 7.30. We left for work about 8.30, depending on arrival of the "Quaker truck". It was a 40 minute ride to the woods where we were given permission to take out the trees - a cold trip in a truck without any tarpaulin. The temperature rarely went above freezing, even at midday, for the whole month. There was no objection made to cutting the lunch period to an hour or even less! Work in the woods stopped at 4; we were home soon after 5 and ate at 6. This left a fairly long evening before the ordinary bed hour: 10 PM.

For the first two weeks, the assigned section of the forest was very difficult side hill terrain. There was snow on the ground. For the first week, there were fewer workers and fewer tools than originally planned. The result was low production only 63 steers in two weeks. Also, unfortunately, it was impossible to get our truck into the tract to haul out our cut each day. We must wait for a thaw until the horses would get in! In the third week, at Ernest's request we were assigned another tract, still a long way from town, still difficult, side hill terrain, but we could get the wood to our truck and haul back a load each day. We cut and hauled to a sawmill in Freiburg between 40 & 50 steers that week.

The last week there was snow again. Most of the week we concentrated on delivering wood, now sawed and chopped into stove sizes to the families on our list. One man went in to make the contact, see whether there was a real need, explain a little who we were, find where wood was to put, and collect payment from if there were to be any.

Then, five others carried the sacks in from truck (the sacks weighed nearly 200 lbs. when full). In several cases, presents of apples, cigars, once even cigarettes were pressed upon us. The list of 240 families in need of wood was obtained by Ernst Hodel from 5 different organizations

- Caritas
- Arbeiterwohlfahrt
- Evangelisches Pfarramt
- Wirtschaftsamt
- Wohlfahrtsamt

In most cases the families certainly were in need of wood. In a few cases it was obvious they still had fairly adequate amounts of wood and we did not leave any. Some even admitted they had enough! A charge of 8½ marks for ½ steere was asked to defray payment to Commune from whose forest came the wood, the sawmill's cutting charge and cost of those who could pay nothing. Often families insisted we take more than 8½ marks.

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

From the city of Freiburg was obtained the use of "refugee quarters". It was one big room about 30' x 40', once a beer or dance hall attached to a hotel in the workingmen's suburb of Haslach. Easily accessible in same building were two flush toilets of which we had exclusive use and also two faucets with good drinking water. A real luxury all that! With two small cook stoves and a good big heating stove we kept comfortably warm with wood of our own cutting. We used the wooden double decker beds made for the refugees. They had removable wooden slats and mattresses of a burlap substitute filled with wood shavings. Both Swiss and French groups had brought in blankets.

The food was more plentiful and somewhat more varied than at the Chateaudun Camp. In addition to food brought in, we got German bread, milk, meat and butter rations. The variety was due to CARE packages (gifts of Swiss & Americans), other special food gifts, and the quantity to supplies of oatmeal & potatoes, brought in from France.

Credit also should go to the Swiss Sister Martha Bosshard and the German girls who helped her. All home work (including laundry and mending) was done by the 3 sisters, except, as men volunteered to make fires, cut wood, sweep up & dry dishes. Breakfast consisted of oatmeal (2 or 3 bowls) with sugar, eaten dry (our small milk ration was mixed in) and a slice of bread with butter or cheese. Lunch in the woods was plenty of thick soup (rather lukewarm) and 2 sandwiches of German bread with Care package meat or cheese filling. Dinner was a thick soup, plenty of potatoes with a meat sauce or Care package Ham and eggs, and finally a sweet desert concocted from Care packages. At 9 PM there was usually a snack of crackers & cocoa or tea. We found it quite comfortable cooking, eating, having meetings or entertaining and sleeping in the same room. The sisters had a bedroom nearby in an Arbeiterwohlfahrt center.

COMMUNITY CONTACTS AND PLAY

Evenings were comparatively free for individual discussion, language study, reading, writing, ping-pong, chess or what we wished. There were no required classes, no scheduled camp meetings. Guests from the University and other friends from the town came almost every evening despite the long walk home (street cars stopped at 9 PM.)

Scheduled events included a talk by an Arbeiterwohlfahrt representative, a University Student's evening (about 15 guests), a song fest (30 guests), an Official guest night (Burgermeister, Welfare agencies and Military Government education office representatives) and an American Quaker Evening.

Our most frequent visitors and constant friends and helpers were Walter and Hanna Rieber, Freiburg friends who lived nearby and Doctor Gertrud Luckner (Friend turned Catholic) of Caritas who had done yeoman service helping German Jews and had been send to Concentration Camp as a result. John Jones of the AFSC team who was the most frequent truck driver did every thing with the camp except sleep there.

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REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In its contact with the students and internationally minded people of Freiburg the camp was a success only to be qualified by its short life. There will be many volunteers available for another camp and they will not come for food chiefly but for outside contacts.

This reporter is in no position to guess at what part if any of our message reached and was understood by Officials, families aided and the man in the street. It is easy for another to criticise there may have been reason why the suggestions would not have been possible of accomplishment. The University did not recommence after Christmas until February 15th. Otherwise it might have been possible to ask for volunteers sooner and chose the best material and those able to stay for the whole four weeks.

Sufficient tools should be available from beginning. A wood cutting site nearer towards on better terrain would have meant better and higher production and less gas consumption.

The French, Danish, English and American (USA) volunteers did not arrive in Freiburg until more than a week after the first Swiss contingent and English Zone Germans.

This was caused by delays in obtaining permission to enter the French Zone. Applications should have been made sooner. It is almost sure always longer than Officials say it will be.

Ideally, the check up on families getting wood, if made by us at all, should have been done before truck arrived.

A delegation of more authority, as to a regular woods crew leader, would have relief for Ernst of a part of his heavy load.

The days plans were often not clear to some of the campers. A fuller announcement with translation and a chance to ask questions or make suggestions might have avoided some delays or misunderstandings. There was but one short Camp meeting held at request of the Anglo-Saxon block. It seemed to your reporter that a chance to show young Germans the virtues and failings of democracy was being missed.

One question that might properly come before whole camp was justification of us foreigners eating German rations.

Of course, ideally, all campers should speak or, more important, understand the language of the country where the camp is located. This was a qualification for Freiburg applicants, I believe. However, at least 4 campers could not understand announcements in German.

The many unscheduled evenings were good; they gave a chance for discussions.

It seems clear that young Germans are glad to join volunteer work camps and that they co-operate well. In addition, there seem to be men in the thirties interested as well among whom many be found leaders. The way is open for more Work Camps in Germany if sufficient food can be brought in, or use of local rations seems justified.

Freiburg is a good spot for a Work Camp from the point of facility of operation and available students, even if there is need not as great as elsewhere in Germany.

French campers are particularly desirable as the greatest bridge of national understanding must be built between them and Germans.

"Here's hoping" there will be another work Camp there soon.

George Loveland