

CONFERENCE ON INTERNATIONAL WORK-CAMPS

Wed 14 May 47 - 9.00 - 12.30 hrs.

convened by International Voluntary Service for Peace

Chair : Magda Kelber
Present : Miss Dunning)
Mr. Williamson) Education Branch, C.C.G.
Captain Spicer)
Mr. Gilligan Exits and Entries Branch, C.C.G.
Mr. Sundberg Internationella Arbetslag, Sweden
Mr. Begert Int. Sec. Service Civil International, Paris
Members of British Red Cross, HQ 5
British Red Cross Liaison Officers
Members of British Red Cross teams - Friends Relief Service
- Guides International Service
- Salvation Army
- British Red Cross
- International Voluntary Service for Peace
Mr. Carstens Chairman of the provisional committee of the
"Internationaler Freiwilliger Dienst für den Frieden".

(I)

Magda Kelber outlined the plan of the conference

- A) Scope and importance of international work-camps particularly in Germany.
- B) Rapid survey of the difficulties of running such camps.
- C) Rapid survey of plans for international work-camps planned for Germany this summer.
- D) Detailed examination of these plans and these difficulties.
- E) Assessment of the value of the conference.

(II)

Outlining the **Scope** and **Importance** of international work-camps, Basil Eastland of the Int. Vol. Service for Peace stressed their importance in Germany today. In and around such work-groups, working together on a socially useful job, and inspired by a "core" of exceptionally fine people both German and other nationalities, there was a possibility of a spirit of international reconciliation and of re-education growing up.

Willy Begert, International Secretary of the "Service Civil International" gave a few facts on the history of international work-camps. Finally he pointed out that the six or more different societies which had hitherto been organising camps independently, had decided in Oct 46 to co-ordinate their efforts in order to utilise their resources most effectively, whilst at the same time preserving their own particular spirit. It now seemed timely, in a similar way, to co-ordinate international work-camp plans in Germany itself.

Rapidly surveying the **Difficulties** of running international voluntary work-camps, Basil Eastland stated that one of the biggest was that of **Food**; extra food to supplement the rations of German volunteers to enable them to undertake heavy manual work; and basic rations for people joining in the camps from abroad.

Currency restrictions limited the payment of fares both for foreigners travelling in Germany and for Germans going abroad. In France, volunteers travelling to international work-camps were given free travel vouchers for the French railways. The possibility of similar privileges on the German railways, both for German and for volunteers coming from abroad should be explored.

He added that in order to expedite the procedure of obtaining **Permits**, accurate particulars of volunteers intending to come to Germany should be obtained right from the start of negotiations.

Among details to be born in mind the following were mentioned

- The source of **Materials, Tools and Equipment** and of **Working-clothes**
- The **Preparation, Running and Rounding off** of a camp;
- The **Work** : choice of work to be undertaken; the relationship between any skilled workers and voluntary workers on the same job; the ratio of men and women being dependent on the type of work;
- The **Volunteers** : selection - young and old; student or worker (if the latter, the problem of special leave from work); each volunteer should in any case sign an application form so that each knows exactly what is the object of the camp.
- The **Camp** : accommodation not necessarily in tents; should be simple; site should not be too inaccessible; optimum number of volunteers; duration of camp; week-end camps; problem of deflection of aim of a camp by the attraction of good food, and the danger of a "holiday" atmosphere; necessity of a "core" of fine personalities to ensure the right spirit in the camp.
- **Responsibility** : for the camp shared by all; but a leader or committee should advise and guide and help to create a community spirit within the camp; Self-discipline should mean work well done, and leisure well spent; regular meetings should provide opportunity for criticism and suggestions.
- **Paper-work** : Some record of the work accomplished and experiences gained, and of the individual contributions of volunteers participating should be kept.
- **Languages** : need careful attention.
- **Health** : Insurance, especially for those coming from abroad; should be carefully checked; Attention should also be paid to First Aid and medical help, inoculations &c.
- **Costs** : Arrangements for the payment of insurance, food, accommodation, tools &c should be settled beforehand.

(III)

International work-camps planned for this summer in Germany:

- 1) **Internationaler Freiwilliger Dienst für den Frieden** (Provisional German branch of the "Service Civil International") From the various branches of SCI there would be only some 50 volunteers available for Germany because the branches concerned were also sending people to other countries. If the principle was to have a high proportion of foreign volunteers in the camps then it would only be possible to run six camps efficiently, Nevertheless the I.F.D.F. were prepared to give as much help as possible to any other organisation running work-camps of its own.
 - i) **Duisburg** - Catholic convalescent home for refugees from the East Land-clearance for food cultivation.
 - ii) **Hanover** - Langenhagen municipal old peoples home: Land-clearance for food cultivation and building reconstruction.
 - iii) **Freiburg** - Municipal children's hospital: building reconstruction.
 - iv) **Berlin** or near Berlin - cutting and collecting of wood and tree-stumps for old and sick people; and/or help with flood damage and reconstruction in the Oderbruch.
 - v) near **Frankfurt** - repairing youth hostel - youth work-camp (16 - 18's)
 - vi) **Oberhausen** - refugee camp in centre of town: road repairs, and construction of playground for children.

Food - heavy workers' rations would be applied for. Help with supplementary supplies from abroad urgently needed.

Tools - contracts made with the various bodies for whom the work was being done, that they should supply tools, pay for food &c.

Size - 20 - 25 volunteers, men and women; average age 18 - 25 yrs; at least 1/3 foreign volunteers.

Duration - 20 Jul - 27 Sep.

- 2) **Internationella Arbetslag** (Sweden)

The Swedish organisation were running a work-camp and a centre in Hamburg, but did not intend to start another camp. If any more Swedish volunteers became available, they could join other existing camps in Germany. The same applied to the Danes.

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- 3) **Friends Relief Service**

i) Hannover who would be working entirely with the Youth Hostels Association had two schemes on paper; both for repairing Youth Hostels

a) **Torfhaus**, in the Harz mountains

b) **Alfeld**

30 British youth hostlers were expected over from England. Unfortunately so far there had not been a very enthusiastic response on the part of the Germans.

ii) **Oldenburg** had more an idea than a plan. There was a home which had been started for young refugee boys and returning POW. The chief job was cutting peat for the old people of Oldenburg and others who could not get peat themselves. It would be run as a scheme by the Jugendamt through the German Red Cross, and even if it were not possible to get foreign volunteers on to the job, the scheme would continue.

iii) **Cologne** was contacting various youth groups in Birmingham in order to get people out to join possible work projects in a bunker-clearing scheme for a youth centre. Week-end work has been going on for a long time.

iv) **Berlin** - converting damaged barracks into dwelling units. Work for 100 students, of whom 50 were expected to come from England, Holland and other countries; of the remaining 50 Germans, 25 would come from the Zones and 25 from Berlin itself. Commencing 15 Jul - 27 Aug. Materials to be supplied through the Magistrat. Working clothes being supplied from US sources. Food for volunteers from abroad being purchased from the Army.

v) **Goslar** might possibly ran a camp in **Hildesheim**, either clearing a Youth Hostel, or a children's playground. The Town authorities would pay expenses; working clothes might be obtained from salvage; food might be got through food parcels from England.

vi) **Aachen** was working on a plan of reconstructing a building to be used as a TB home.

vii) Dortmund had a scheme for a German camp to help rebuilding the Old people's home **Itünen**.

4) **American Friends Service Committee**

There plans were of more permanent nature than international work-camps; they were establishing Neighbourhood Centres; bringing and building their own huts.

i) **Frankfurt**

ii) **Darmstadt**

iii) **Berlin**

5) **Friends Ambulance Unit** (Post-War Service)

at present co-operating in the Swedish centre in Hamburg. It is possible that they might take over a work-camp at

Farge near Bremen. Protestant hospital for refugees from the East road-repairing, land-clearance, building reconstruction. Probable duration six months.

6) **Salvation Army**

It appeared that there was no question of a camp being run in Essen after all.

(IV)

There seemed to be two main factors limiting the number of camps which could be run the number of volunteers from abroad and supplies, especially of Food.

Volunteers

It was asked whether numbers of societies in Britain and elsewhere other than IVSP could not be invited across to Germany for short periods for summer work-camps, and in reply it was pointed out that the Education Branch would have to sponsor the entries of these volunteers, and would therefore find it easier to have them all channelled through one person.

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Similarly the Education Branch would have to sponsor the Exit of German volunteers destined for international work-camps in other countries, and the following procedure would have to be followed

Procedure for obtaining Entry Permits

for volunteers coming from abroad :

- a) a List of volunteers wishing to enter Germany and take part in international work-camps has to be prepared. This list shows full names, address and dates of their intended service in Germany. this list is submitted to the Education Branch for sponsorship and forwarding to Entries and Exits Branch.
- c) then the sponsorship has been obtained, the volunteers can be asked to apply in the military permit office in their own countries for an entry visa for the British Zone.
- d) meanwhile Entries and Exits Branch will have communicated with the appropriate Military Permit Office giving instructions for the issue of the Entry visa on application from the volunteers.

Note : Once sponsorship of the volunteers had been obtained the delay in getting the permit should not be much longer than a week.

Procedure for obtaining Exit Permits for Germans wishing to take part in camps abroad

- a) submit a list of the volunteers to the Education Branch for sponsoring . The list should contain names, addresses, country to which they are going, with dates of their intended service. Having been sponsored, this list should be passed to Entries and Exits.
- b) the society in the country to which a volunteer is going should write an official invitation to the volunteer, and at the same time obtain from the appropriate Foreign Office a statement that it is prepared to accept the volunteer in that country. This is forwarded to the Consular authority in Germany who should inform the volunteer.
- c) the volunteer applies to the appropriate Consul for an entry visa, submitting, as variously required, certain certificates of character &c.
- d) the volunteer applies to the Entries and Exits branch through his Oberbürgermeister or Landrat for Forms EE/227 and EE/226/B which he has to fill in triplicate and to provide three photographs of himself. At the same time he must submit the letter from the Consul stating that he will receive an entry permit. Within a period of four weeks he should then be issued with a Temporary Travel document and an Exit Permit, through the office in Berlin.

(Volunteers - continued)

The Education Advisor to the Deputy Military Governor, Mr. Robert Birkley, Headmaster of Charterhouse, was preparing a plan for co-ordinating the entry of members of voluntary societies into Germany for Educational purposes, and it was hoped that the plan would be ready in time to get volunteers out for the summer activities.

German volunteers.

Contrary to the experience to the Hanover team, the I.F.D.F. had had far more volunteers than it was possible to absorb into camps.

It would therefore be possible to provide volunteers from this pool, for international work-camps run by societies other than the I.F.D.F.

Supplies

The doubts of one speaker as to the advisability of importing food for the use of people from abroad even though pooled with that of the German work-camp volunteers, were not shared by others present at the conference, and it was pointed out that relief teams in any case were living on a much higher standard of rations than the Germans, and yet they appeared to overcome any possible resentment which the Germans might feel. It was the quality of the people coming into Germany from abroad to join in international work-camps which mattered so much. There was such a need for spiritual food in Germany.

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This was supported by Mr. Carstens, the chairman of the provisional German branch of "Service Civil International" (I.F.D.F.), whose personal experience in international work-camps organised to date in Germany showed that it was easily discernible how much the youth of the present day was still wrapped up in the experiences that they had had during the war.

It was astonishing to find how much, even in a camp run for peace, there was a tendency to talk about war, and how self-centred youth was. There was a great need to re-discover the value of the individual.

So many of the young people were lost; they did not know where to find a hold on life and where to find new hope. Of course, a fortnight in an international work-camp could not hope to bring them to their new goal, but it did help them to start out. Most Germans who had joined in camps spoke very highly of their experience there. It was therefore of vital importance that "personalities" from abroad should continue to take part in the camps. Working together and achieving something produced results mere discussion groups and talking together had been unable to achieve. Admittedly a lot of good work was being done by such discussion groups yet it was noticeable that in so many cases, interest and attendance waned after a time.

Food

There seemed a possibility of getting small bulk supplies from abroad to supplement German rations. The American Friends Service Committee had allocated a certain gift to purchase food for German international work-camps. This food would be divided among the camps by the A.F.S.C. office in Paris.

It was decided that all particulars of international work-camps should be sent to Basil Eastland who could submit the complete list to Paris.

Don Suisse had promised to help in ordinary camps for children, and they would be approached to see whether food could be allocated to work-camps as well.

There was the possibility of small supplies being collected in Holland and being brought in by truck, also it might prove difficult to obtain the Dutch Export licence for such supplies.

Some supplies would also come with volunteers from Denmark, and there was a possibility of a very small quantity from the British Red X. Camps having military postal address would be able to receive food parcels from other countries.

Volunteers coming from abroad would be asked to bring with them as much food as possible.

It had been found that it was possible for business men &c visiting Germany to buy food from the Army. It was thought possible that the ruling whereby such visitors might purchase such food for 2/6 d per day might be extended for foreign volunteers for international work-camps in the way in which the F.R.S. Berlin work-camp had been promised.

German volunteers had been able to draw heavy workers' rations in most work-camps in the past. It might be possible to iron out any difficulties in obtaining such higher rations which other camps might experience, by obtaining a Zonal ruling from the German authorities.

(V)

Conclusion.

It was found necessary and agreed to request one person to co-ordinate all the work. Basil Eastland was asked whether he would take on the task, and agreed provided that he could receive a certain amount of help. Thus, applications for American food from Paris would be channelled through him, and also he would be kept informed of surplus German volunteers or of shortages of German volunteers. He would also act as a clearing house for volunteers coming from abroad.

Other matters needing investigation were: currency for volunteers coming into and going out of Germany; and the question of volunteers travelling on military trains

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22 May 47