

IVSP Germany

HQ 5, British Red Cross,  
B.A.O.R. 1, Germany

C O P Y

of a private letter sent from a Polish work-camper to a group of Germans

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Quaker Mission,  
ul. Hoza 35,  
Warszawa. 6 Sep 47

Dear German Work-campers

The report of our delegate to the Askov conference - Alun Davies about your kind attitude towards us and our work-camp movement has made me very glad. The Polish - German problem is one of the most complicated that we have to face. The word German is still connected in the minds of Poles with the most fearful and sad recollections and I am much afraid that most of the Germans are still thinking of us as the "lower race". There is a centuries' burden of prejudices which do not permit our friendly relations. There are millions of people on both sides unable to think unemotionally of the other side. And there are small groups of people on each side trying to improve the mutual relations in spite of all prejudices of the nations.

I think this is no right place and no time now to search for the reasons of the old German - Polish hate in this letter. But I think it ought to be considered and discussed if we really do want to build a better world.

The thing I am now going to write about is of more concrete character. In our struggle for friendly relations between our nations we have very similar difficulties which are sometimes greatest within our own nation. And here, I think, our situation in Poland is still more complicated. It is easier, as you have, to say to the people "there is a nation we have done much wrong to, let us love them now", than to say "there is a nation that has done much wrong to us, let us love them".

I think there is a great progress when there is existing a group of youth in Poland now ready to make a fresh start with our mutual relations not considering the past. I think it is much if there are young people in our country ready to meet some of the German work-campers. Your readiness in helping Polish work-campers passing through Germany has given us great pleasure. We accept it gladly and believe that this will be the first step towards the improvement of our mutual relations.

But there is your second proposal: sending some toys for the Polish children. Although we have accepted your first proposal I don't feel that we could accept toys. I hate the thought that this our refusal could offend you or let you feel that we don't desire to make our best and therefore I will try to explain what are the reasons for it. I think that it is too early to start such an action between average Polish people. The children themselves have too fresh recollection of the occupation time. I am afraid the people are too sceptic, too cynical sometimes in their attitude to your nation. I am afraid that people would say that you try to pay with toys for the wrongs that have been done with concentration camps, crematoriums and so on. I hope you will be able to understand me in the right way. I know myself that you are representing this part of your society which never agreed with Hitler's ideology but there is really too great disproportion between the toys and all the fears still associated with your nation in our people's mind.

I hope to receive your answer soon. I wish you all the best in your work and hope to meet some of you next summer in some foreign work camps.

Wanda Zarzewska