

Between two Worlds
September 28, 1947

Dear Basil Eastland,

I am indeed glad we had such a good chat in London after my recent adventures in Germany IFDF camps. Now I have little if anything to add except my official thanks but I do want to add them and maybe the best way I can do that is to make this something of an "official" report. Do consider what follows to be a feeble effort to summarize my impressions with an overwhelming urge to be encouraging to thee and the others who are striving so faithfully to make these camps fulfil our dreams.

1.

My greatest impression is that these camps have been thoroughly worth holding. With all their shortcomings they nevertheless have definitely begun to meet a need, to awaken a vision, to strengthen the faith. Nothing else that I may write could detract from this overwhelming conviction. These camps have been worth all the time and effort that has been given them and I for one am only sorry that I have not been able to give more.

2.

I have been impressed with the quality of many of these campers, their quality and their hunger. I had been led to expect many products of Hitlerism who would be plenty shallow, plenty two-faced, plenty anti-religious and we did find some of every sort, but certainly the number of sincerely seeking young people, deeply interested in religious issues was in the majority. Most, when we got to know them, were keenly interested in Poland and what the Poles thought of the Germans and what possibilities there wherever going to Poland to help rebuild. They were sobered when I told them that any who went must be prepared to face what a Negro faces in the most prejudiced sections of white America they were sobered but not "daunted". I also pointed out that many German hoping to work in Poland should start now to contact the Poles in Germany to make friends with them and also start to learn the Polish language. I only met one camper, Günther Lenz at Langenhagen, who might well be ready to go to Poland next summer (having triumphed in spirit over the loss of his home in Silesia and knowing the Polish language) but there may well be others now or by next spring who will be ready.

3.

Most of the campers were hungry for more than they were getting in the camps. Almost everyone was finding satisfaction in the constructive work they were doing and, to some extent, in the comradeship and security of the camp community. However, in three of the four camps we visited campers left the camp earlier than they had expected due to their disappointment, during our brief visits. How many have left during the summer disappointed I do not know but we should be sad if there had been but one. Some of those who were disappointed were new campers who had not been made really feel at home in the rapidly changing group. Others were veterans of one or more previous services who had only found a repetition, and a less satisfying one, of what they had experienced before, the very set-up almost forcing them to go through the same "getting acquainted" kind of experiences rather than going deeper beyond the point where they left off after their previous service. Several of the most disappointed were the foreign campers, who perhaps came to get more than to give but who found themselves simply overwhelmed by the "one hundred or more" German campers that they had associated with. Out of such a changing mixture of German campers they had failed to make any deep and lasting friendships, and they were returning to Sweden or Denmark without any desire to come and serve again ... Most of these campers and many of those more satisfied with the camps were at the same time hungry for more adequate answers to their searching questions as to the meaning and hope in life than they were finding. To simply say that we must work together as brothers is not enough, we must have our campers so experience their solidarity with others in our camp communities that they come to know that a new and better life is actually possible, starting now with ourselves.

4.

There is certainly a real need for more leaders and campers to have a clear understanding of the possible purposes and values of these work camps. I was particularly amazed to see how little the campers were aware of their opportunities to bring love and encouragement to the communities of which they were a part. Those working at Oberhausen and Duisburg had extra fine opportunities but almost no one seemed to be aware of the joy they were missing in not trying to make these discouraged refugees and their many children a bit happier. At Langenhagen the camp had the cordial cooperation of the hospital officials but I doubt if many of the other residents of the community really felt deeply glad for their presence. I also wished that a big sign had been prepared, perhaps listing the nations represented by workers on the project, to inform the many passers-by who stopped momentarily outside the fence but who were too far away to talk to or to enlist to help in the work. This would have helped at Freiburg also.

5.

Only at one camp, Duisburg, did I find a really conscious effort to achieve community within the camp group. Each camp had one degree or another of community, one degree or another of democratic leadership from alongside, of voluntary actions, but there was not nearly enough conscious effort to draw out the best in each camper to achieve a really precious community of love.

6.

Leadership was everywhere good intentioned but only at Duisburg was it inspiring. At Oberhausen, the leader was discouraged, at Langenhagen inexperienced, and at Freiburg, elderly and undemocratic. In each camp the head-sister played a distinctly secondary role, being largely confined to her responsibilities in the housekeeping. This was a serious loss to all the camps, Either there should be a second person primarily responsible for the housekeeping or a much more democratic plan should be worked out so that the Headsister could really be a co-leader promoting the deeper spirit and purposes of the camp.

7.

The work projects, I felt, were well chosen, meeting real needs in ways that the campers were qualified to undertake. In Langenhagen the noise made discussion difficult on the work project, at Duisburg it thrived, and at Freiburg it was prohibited. At Oberhausen the lack of a truck required a terribly long haul by wheelbarrow while several of the other jobs there seemed less than the most significant but the overall choice of a camp location was good.

8.

The educational program seemed considerably more formalized and from the top down than necessary or good but there was much interest on these educational evenings, at least when we were there.

9.

The food was certainly adequate. Perhaps the health of the German young people requires it to be that adequate but if it erred at all it erred on the side of being too adequate, of being so much better than they would get otherwise that it did tempt prospective campers to come for the food and did not contribute much to the growth of a disciplined and sacrificial youth movement, capable of a future without subsidy.

10.

I was amazed to find the keen interest in the place of silent meditation in our camps and was particularly glad to find that the Duisburg camp had agreed upon really significant periods of quiet before their meals. This seemed a much more natural IVSP technique than the more foreign separate periods of meditation or worship suggested by some of us accustomed to such in Quaker camps. The quiet time before breakfast was preceded by a quotation and if these quotations are proposed by as large a proportion of the campers as are willing to volunteer I would think it would contribute as much (or more) as separate periods especially when most campers are not accustomed to sharing vocally in what might be called a period of worship.

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The achieving of a democratic, voluntary atmosphere in the camp ... a loving community ... should be the conscious purpose of any such periods of silence, with those recognizing their need to draw upon

spiritual resources beyond themselves encouraged to do so without alienating those who sense no such need.

11.

The recommendation that Marjatta Miettinen and I made to Heinrich Carstens at the beginning of our series of visits in favour of having camp groups stay together for whatever period was possible rather than having the camp group continuously changing with campers coming and going almost daily has been concurred in by almost every camper we have met. We reaffirm this recommendation primarily because we failed to find hardly any campers who have yet really experienced the precious faithbuilding communities of love which we know are possible and which we feel must actually be experienced for campers to be adequately motivated and strengthened for the tasks ahead. I would hope that at least one camp in Germany next summer could be held for a group able to stay together for a full eight weeks for not more than 3 or 4 campers such as industrial workers who could not possibly come for full time being welcomed in order to make the group more representative. I would also hope that camps could be arranged for those able to stay together as a community for a solid period of four weeks, or three weeks, or two weeks. If so there should be a clear break between camps and the personnel carrying over for more than one group should be given a real chance to catch their breath. Possibly in addition such "hotel" camps as held as held this year should be continued but the great need is to have those who have already been enlisted by such camps now have a deeper and more life-changing further experience of community rather than a mere repetition of their first experience which will cause their original enthusiasm to dissipate.

12.

Our other recommendation to Heinrich Carstens I'd also like to reaffirm. One of the greatest needs we felt was for the leadership of next summer's work camps to actually experience the type of work camp that we hope they will seek to achieve in their camps. If a leadership training work camp could be held in late April and early May we could hope that those who participated could go forward into their summer opportunities with a clarified purpose and with unity of spirit and consecration that would help to permeate the whole movement with that fire that is necessary if it is to fulfil its real mission.

Thee knows that Marjatta and I would both be eager to participate in such a training camp if it seems right at all for me to return to Europe. She might well, of course, participate anyway, and so, I hope, would Piet Kruithof. All of us fall far short of being the kind of people we should be for the job we need to try to do but surely we can learn from the experience of Jesus that it is much better to invest as nearly as possible the whole vision in the hearts of a few people than to spread a fraction of the vision over many people, for if the few really catch the vision they will carry it far beyond themselves ... And those few, perhaps I should add, need not all be the actual directors of camps, for the very best leadership in any camp is "from alongside", whether official or not.

Finally I want to bear further testimony to the calibre of the men and women we met in the camps and thank them for the wonderful way they welcomed us into their hearts. From each camp we came away overwhelmingly grateful. They have made me really want to come back next spring to see how much they have grown, how much of the vision they have really made their own. May thee and Heinrich and the others carry on with renewed encouragement and devotion. You do have your hands on the beginnings of what may prove to be one of the greatest hope-restoring movements of our times. May the great Source of all hope strengthen you as you carry on.

With love,

David S. Richie