

REPORT ON THE WORKCAMP CONFERENCE HELD AT ASKOV, DENMARK OCTOBER 28 – NOVEMBER 1, 1947

Introduction

Although the Conference was called by the Service Civil International and its associated organizations delegates from some 11 other organizations were in attendance all of whom took an active part in the proceedings. (Attached is the official list of representatives and organizations). The two dozen representatives came from 14 different countries Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Poland, Great Britain and the United States, which is further evidence of its representative character. English was the official language of the conference although the delegates from France and Belgium spoke in French and several of the other delegates occasionally used German. The sessions were held in one of the buildings of the Askov Volks Highschool and meals were served in an adjoining building. Several of the evening meetings were held in the living room of this second building which is used as a dormitory for women students during the winter term of the school.

The conference was an unusually industrious one, with morning, afternoon and evening sessions (with occasional times off for coffee or stretching) but part of one afternoon was devoted to a tour of the Askov School buildings under the guidance of Juul Andersen. It is an adult school, intended primarily for farmers and other workers, and gives no certificates or degrees at the end of the courses. The winter term, which begins after the harvest, allows agricultural workers to continue with their studies beyond the regular school age. We learned further that Askov is only one of many such "highschools" throughout the country.

Several days prior to October 28th the SCI delegates met to consider their own particular problems of organization and operation but in the afternoon of the 28th the conference formally began for all attendees.

Oct. 28., Afternoon Session

Willy Begert served as chairman of this session and explained that the reasons for the conference were the same as for the Brussels Conference last year - to bring together the various organizations interested in workcamps in Europe for discussions of common aims and problems, to report on past experiences and to plan for the future.

Each organization was invited to state briefly its performance during the past year

- (1) The AFSC reported 26 camps operating in 6 different countries with 460 volunteers.
- (2) Internationella Arbetslag (Swedish) was organized in 1943 and this past year had camps in Sweden and Germany.
- (3) Fredsvenners Hjelpetjeneste (Norwegian) concentrated its work in Finnmark in northern Norway.
- (4) Fredsvenners Hjaelparbejde (Danish) has no permanent organization but is supported by seven Danish groups interested in peace. Its workers served in several countries during the past year.
- (5) FAU / PWS (British) reported through a letter from Jack Eglon on its work during the past year and on its plans to close at the end of 1948.
- (6) FRS (British) reported on its work in Germany and on its intention to begin closing its program by next March.
- (7) VKT, the Finnish organization growing out of the AFSC reported on the seven camps in Finland during the past summer.
- (8) CCSC representatives had not yet arrived.
- (9) FSC representatives had not yet arrived.
- (10) SCI and its 8 branches operating in 8 different countries was reported on by Willy Begert,

Under the general heading of our aims Willy Begert suggested that we are all consciously peace-seeking even though our motivation may not always be C.O. or pacifist. There was some discussion of the difference between the AFSC and SCI regarding the religious motivation for the camps but it was felt that nothing useful could be gained by going into the subject again. To many people, especially in Europe, the word "religious" has a church or sectarian connotation.

Where organizations represented at this conference probably differ from an organization such as the Youth Hostel Association is that our chief emphasis is "working for peace through voluntary community working, living and learning together; a constructive, not merely negative, approach".

Oct. 28., Evening Session

The first part of this session was devoted to the showing of several films of the Fredvenners Hjaelparbejde of their work in Finland and Poland. The second part of the session was devoted to a discussion of workcamp leadership - the importance of good leadership, some of the necessary qualifications and some of the problems.

Oct. 29., Morning Session

Ogden Hannaford was chosen as chairman.

Reports of various organizations was continued as follows

(8) CCSC reported on the Le Chambon school project. At one time 130 workers were involved in this.

(9) FSC Friends Peace Committee reported that it had only had experience with one camp in England.

After discussion it was decided to prepare a statement of our common aims to be used in a publicity pamphlet by all cooperating organizations. Mary Howarth and Basil Eastland were chosen to prepare such a statement, and to report back to the conference later.

Lessons of 1947

- (1) In normal camps, 15 – 25 seems to be the best size. It seems undesirable, however, to fix a definite standard for all projects and all ages. If possible, the work project should be proportional to the size of the camp, and vice versa.
- (2) Financing SCI depends on community support but workers pay their own travelling expenses. If the community supports a project financially as well as with equipment there is greater moral obligation on the part of the campers to do a good job and complete the project and less sense of charity. IVSP has experimented successfully with the pooling of travel expenses.
- (3) Selection of volunteers Great difference in practice. Apparent agreement on desirability of requiring "home service" before approval for foreign service. Criticism of AFSC policy of recruiting which leads to a preponderance of students and teachers and to certain economic and social groups. In Switzerland camps about 50 % are manual workers. Language qualifications stressed. Health also stressed.
- (4) Working hours 40 – 44 hours seems normal, although there is considerable variation in practice. It is desirable to conform to local conditions as far as possible but to allow sufficient time for other community services and for developing camp life. Food condition in particular countries an important factor in determining hours of work.

Oct. 29., Afternoon Session

International workcamp plans for 1948 (See special forms). About 76 camps in 16 countries are contemplated. Approximately 50 of these are summer camps and the rest are January, Easter and all-year-round camps. It was also estimated that about 568 volunteers would be available for camps in foreign countries (75 was suggested as the total for the AFSC although as many as 100 may have to be provided for if there are 50 camps and two Americans per camp). All plans at this point remain tentative and flexible.

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Oct. 29., Evening Session

Ingverta Sveggum reported on UNESCO's interest in workcamps as follows. This past summer UNESCO initiated a "pilot" project and experimented with lectures, literature, etc.

The plans for 1948 included: initiating contacts with member governments; supporting educational and recreational programs; Facilitating participation of volunteers from member states by helping with clearances, currency restrictions, etc.: encouraging volunteers from all walks of life; facilitating transport of workers by urging governments to relax various restrictions; establishing libraries in the 20 or 30 camps which UNESCO hopes to sponsor; diffusing through mass media information about the purposes and value of workcamps; and establishing a special camp for educational directors, probably somewhere near Paris.

In discussing this report much appreciation was expressed for UNESCO's interest and support and continued and growing cooperation was hoped for. Exception was taken to the use of the words "Youth Service Camps" as suggesting camps for youth under 18 instead of for those above 18. Camps for "prospective leaders" were also objected to, but the UNESCO idea of helping educational programs through a special camp was accepted.

Oct. 30., Morning Session

Mary B. Haworth was chosen as chairman of today's sessions.
Discussions were continued on specific problems as follows

- (5) Finance and insurance It was agreed that anyone volunteering for more than six weeks should have pocket money paid by the receiving organization and that costs of travel should be shared between the sending and receiving organizations. There nor apparent uniformity in the case of health and accident insurance. After considerable discussion it was agreed that the sending organization should be responsible for disablement (through insurance, releases from the volunteers, or payment in case of accidents) and that the receiving organization be responsible for accidents and health, with special exceptions and arrangements where necessary. Dependency allowances should be the responsibility of the sending organization.
- (6) Exchanges of volunteers It was generally recommended that all organizations in a country be informed when a volunteer is sent or requested, and for the AFSC, that the Paris office be informed of all transfers. For Austria later arrangements can be made through a single representative, probably through the SCI representative from Switzerland who will go to Austria early next year. In asking for volunteers the asking organization shall approach directly the sending organization.
- (7) Visitors. There seems to be no solution to the problem of announced visitors except "friendly hostility" and advance publicity regarding entertainment policy.
- (8) Women in camps The present excess of women volunteers presents somewhat of a problem. No fixed percentages of men and women was recommended, but in view of the surplus of women workers projects should be chosen which are suitable both for men and women.

International Liaison Office

There was agreement on the need for liaison but not for a separate office. The functions of a liaison officer are to convene and carry out decisions of conferences; to prepare a pamphlet explaining the work of the various organizations; carry out other publicity; act as a clearing house on various projects and to try to discover suitable projects; to publish a new sheet; and to represent the member organizations with UNESCO and other important bodies.

Oct. 30., Afternoon Session

Under International Liaison Office continued, Ogden Hannaford was suggested for an interim liaison officer for a six months period (December – July).

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500.000 francs the probably cost of the International Secretariat-Liaison Office for 1948 of which about 1/3, or 160.000 francs should come from the cooperating organizations. AFSC would probably be asked

to contribute more than the 18.000 of last year. Willy Begert will send out a definite memo re these funds and figures as soon as possible. Request that printed matter, photos, etc. Be sent to liaison office, especially photo blocks suitable for joint pamphlet.

A discussion of statement of aim to go in the joint pamphlet resulted in agreement and endorsement of the project. Further details will be worked out through the International Secretariat.

There followed an explanation of week-end workcamps, such as those in Finland and Germany, and a "new" organizations, such as the AFSC / SCI group in Italy.

Oct. 30., Evening Session

Sigrid Lund served as chairman of this session.

The session was devoted to a discussion of Germany and the German people. The representatives of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, France, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Finland, Poland, England and the U.S.A. all explained present attitudes in their own countries towards the Germans.

The two representatives of Germany then explained the present attitude and problems of the Germans themselves.

Oct. 31., Morning Session

Willy Begert was asked to serve as chairman for the final sessions.

Additional Problems:

International cookbook It was decided to find out if a satisfactory cookbook exists, otherwise to encourage each country to send in a few simple recipes suited to the present economic state. The object in camps should be to have enough food to maintain good health. An effort should be made, however, to avoid giving the impression of luxury or too great a difference from the surrounding community. Adapting food to diets of other countries from which volunteers come should be kept in mind. Volunteers should be warned about food conditions in the country in which they will serve. Sanitation stressed as a corollary to the food problem.

Sleep. This is a constant problem with no uniform solution. Eight hours per night the usual objective. Get group agreement and support.

Simple camp life also an objective to work for. Certain dangers in over-equipping, too efficient organization and luxuries quarters and surroundings; and of these things may destroy camp initiative, camp spirit and unity.

International songbook Solicitation of songs (both words and music) suitable for a new book. Songs suitable both for singing and folk dancing desirable. Words should be in original language with translation at bottom of the page. Should not all organizations represented at this conference be sponsors? Rather than just the AFSC?

Manual workers Desirability of having more manual workers in camps rather than just students and teachers. The problem involves less vacation time, taking a skilled worker away from his regular job and putting him at unskilled work, language deficiencies, finances, etc. These problems can be partly met by giving greater publicity to value of camps, securing cooperation of factory managers, and personal recruiting, especially of leftists (or of Conservatives in England).

Interpreting the meaning of the camp to the community Has been done in various ways. Signboard suggestion giving names of countries represented and sponsoring organizations. Desirability of camp itself deciding early in the period how best to get close to the community.

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Oct. 31., Afternoon Session

Consideration of additional problems.

Democracy in Camp "Leadership and governing of a camp is a fine art" but campers should be made to realize that democracy is not anarchy and that the group as a whole should be responsible for

camp organization and operation. Leaders of workcamps cannot very well be chosen by workcampers themselves, but once a camp is in operation many functions can be carried out by the campers themselves.

Youth Camps Great difference of opinion regarding the success of these camps. Work project should be important and dramatic enough to appeal to 15 – 18 years olds. Specially qualified leadership is important.

Paid workers in camp Precedent of mason in Italy was a happy one and more experimentation may be desirable.

Difficult volunteers. "We should not try too hard to make ideal camps". We should also not be afraid to have difficult people in our camps, but, if the limit of patience is reached, it may be necessary sometimes to let a volunteer return home. In SCI camps a leader must consult the national secretary before a person is sent away from camp. When possible the group as a whole should decide what to do with a "difficult" volunteer. Liquor brought into a camp one of the few cases where a volunteer can be sent home without consulting national secretary.

Oct. 31., Evening Session

Russians in workcamps subject for discussion at this session. No success in Poland and Finland trying to get Russian students to participate. Suggested exchange of students met with no response. In Vienna a Russian officer was invited to inspect the work project (which was in the Russian zone of the city). This officer apparently interested but thought there would be no chance of organizing such a camp in Russia. His chief interest was in the political view of the campers

Only chance of work in Russian Zone of Berlin would be under Communist youth organization. Frequently no answers received to various kinds of overtures.

SUPPLEMENT TO MINUTES OF ASKOV CONFERENCE

Consulting with Mary Howarth re Finland Workcamps, Oct. 31.

- (1) It is still undecided whether VKT will affiliate with SCI.
- (2) AFSC (Paris or Philadelphia) should state its policy regarding these new workcamp organizations which it is helping to develop. Should they be encouraged to be autonomous or to affiliate with SCI?
- (3) 20 or fewer American volunteers wanted for the 5 camps being planned for next summer.
- (4) Growing confidence in SCI, especially as it seems to be more flexible in its policies.
- (5) Idea of having volunteers better acquainted with country in which they are working by having industrial experience either before or after workcamp experience.

Consultation with Willy Begert re recruiting of Americans, Oct. 31

- (1) Will leave it to judgement of AFSC regarding previous camp experience as a prerequisite to foreign service.
- (2) Desire to continue AFSC and American recruiting agency rather than to organize a branch of SCI in the States.
- (3) AFSC to decide on how many volunteers it can send over, but 100 is probably the maximum if there are to be 50 summer camps and not more than 2 Americans per camp.
- (4) AFSC's chief contribution to the workcamp movement in Europe can be through the providing of volunteers (and, if possible, accepting volunteers from European countries).

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LIST OF REPRESENTATIVES AT ASKOV CONFERENCE

Service Civil International

Willy Begert Int.Sec.SCI 9 Rue Guy de la Brosse, Paris Ve

Ralph Hegnauer	IZD	Gartenhofstraße 7, Zürich 4	CH
Derek Edwards	IVSP	34 Broadway, London W.1	GB
Yvette Levèbvre	SCVI	9 Guy de la Brosse, Paris Ve	F
Piet Kruithof	IVH	Mauritsstraat 102, Utrecht	NL
Andre Lemaire	SCVI	18 Rue de Station, Ransart (Hainaut)	B
Inge Fostvedt-Sletten	IFH	Staffeldtsgatan 5 / 607, Oslo	N
Heinrich Carstens	IZD	Caprivistraße 59, Hamburg-Blankenese	D
Basil Eastland	IZD / IVSP	HQ5, British Red Cross, Vlotho / Weser, BOAR 1	
Andreas Berntsen	ICT		DK
Ernst Schwartz	IZD	Liechtensteinstraße 49, Wien IX	A

Internationella Arbetslag

Göte Svendsen	Herkulesgatan 22, Stockholm	S
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AFSC / QIVS

Ogden Hannaford	17 Rue Notre Dame des Champs, Paris Vie	USA
Edward Wright	AFSC, USFA HQ, APO 777, c/o U.S.Army	USA
Mary Barclay Howarth	AFSC, Frederikinkatu 77, Helsinki	USA

Vapaaehtoisten Kansainvälliset Tuoleirit(VKT)

Marietta Mattinen	Frederikinkatu 77, Helsinki	FIN
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Friends Service Council and Friends Peace Committee

John Harper	Friends House, Euston Road, London N.W.1	GB
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Friends Relief Service

Lucille Day	4 FRS, BOAR Germany	GB
Alun Davies	AFSC Quaker Transport, Gora Pulaeska, Pulawy, Poland	

AFSC / QIVS / SCI in Italy

Bob Forsberg	AFSC, Via Guillo Barrile, Rom	
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Friends Ambulance Unit - Post War Service

Peter Jackson	4 Gordon Square, London W.C.1	GB
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Fredsvenners Hjelpetjeneste

Sigrid Lund	Gyldenlovesgatan 24, Oslo	N
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Congregational Christian Service Committee

Ray Pitsker	Le College Cevenal, Le Chambon sur Lignon, Haute Loire, France	
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Fredsvenners Hjaelparbejde

Arne Fremm	Vennusgade 24 / 5, Copenhagen	DK
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UNESCO

Ingverta Sviggum	UNESCO House, 19 Avenue Kleber, Paris	
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