

Report of Conference of three German relief teams held
on Sunday, 22nd August, 1948, at H.Q.5., Vlotho

Present : John Harvey, Chairman, I.V.S.P.
Heinrich Carstens, Chairman, I.Z.D.
Bill Bowman, Senior Representative

Unit 4 (Schleswig)
Edith Thompson, Section Leader
Bill Forse,
Peggy Milne,
Douglas Treadwell,
Jim Tapp,
Fred Deutsch.

Unit 5 (Berlin)
Pegeen Morris,
Norman Stanley-Grace.

Unit 7 (Duisburg)
Elsie Gainham, Section Leader,
Eileen Taylor,
Keith Bywaters,
Monica Clipstone.

Bill welcomed John Harvey and Heinrich Carstens and said that he had received a telegram of greetings from Derek who sent us best wishes for a successful conference.

John said that he brought greetings from I.V.S.P. to all team members and to Heinrich and the I.Z.D. He himself welcomed the opportunity of meeting the teams together and of seeing something of their work.

1.

Future of the Teams

Bill drew attention to the fact that by the end of September all the teams would be reduced in strength and there was only one possible replacement (male). In order to get a clear picture of the situation, he asked each team leader to state how many members of the team were willing to stay on until the end of March and what was considered to be the minimum number of personnel required for each team.

Edith said that six members of the Schleswig team - three men and three women - were prepared to stay until the end of March. In view of the large area to be covered, it was felt that the team should not be reduced to less than six members.

In reply to a suggestion from Bill that there might be some reduction in the area covered by the team, Edith said that the team would not wish to do that as there was need for our work in every part of the area. Also it was unlikely that C.B.S.R.A. would put in another team if 109 withdrew or would transfer any part of the area to either of the other two C.B.S.R.A. teams since they were both covering fairly large areas already.

Pegeen said that the present strength of the Berlin team was four - two men and two women - and these four were prepared to stay on until next March. This was felt to be the minimum number of personnel to carry on the work at its present level. The team were strongly of the opinion that, in the prevailing circumstances, every effort should be made to retain a team in Berlin. A number of British people had already left Berlin and it would have a bad psychological effect if the team withdraw altogether. The Salvation Army and Quaker teams with whom Unit 5 were working had been reduced to four and two members respectively.

With regard to Unit 7, Elsie said that three members - herself, Eileen and Monica - were prepared to stay on until next March. They felt that, to carry out their present work as a team, they required a minimum of four members (the fourth to be, preferably, a man), but that it would be better to carry on with even a reduced personnel than that the work should cease altogether in Duisburg.

Bill suggested that perhaps a man could be spared from the Schleswig team to go to Duisburg in case the new replacement did not materialise.

Edith said that this would make the position in Schleswig very difficult and Jim said that he had only agreed to stay on in Schleswig until next March because he felt that it was hardly worth while getting a new replacement to take over the work in his Kreis for six months only.

Elsie said that she did not wish to take a man from another team, as she fully realised the difficulties; rather than do that, Unit 7 would manage without a man. Both Eileen and Monica agreed to this.

After some general discussion on the point, it was finally agreed that the teams should remain as they are until next March, i.e. Berlin - 4, Schleswig - 6, Duisburg - 3. If the male replacement mentioned by Bill decided to switch over to I.V.S.P. (he was already in Germany) he would be sent to Duisburg. If any fresh replacement were forthcoming in England, Derek should be asked to send only such volunteers who were very adaptable and likely to be of some use in the teams within the next six months.

Bill said that he would make some enquiries as to the likelihood of other C.B.S.R.A. teams taking over the work from us at the end of March. If this was unlikely, it would mean that the teams would have to make arrangements to hand over the whole of their work to Germans.

Elsie asked if Bill would obtain some guidance from Derek as to which items of the teams' equipment could be left in Germany e.g. whether camp beds, etc. could be handed over to I.Z.D.

2.

Food from Denmark

Edith referred to the large consignment of food which the Fredsvenners Hlaelparbejde were sending into Germany, part of which was for German p.o.w.'s returning from Russia and part for IZD work-camps. She understood from Bill that the items handed over to IZD should be food capable of being stored for twelve months. Unit 4 felt very strongly that it was unjustifiable for anyone to store food in Germany for such a long time, in view of the present distress among the civilian population. The German rations appeared to be steadily improving and it was hoped that the situation in twelve months' time would be considerably better for all concerned, but at the present time there was urgent need for food among the Germans, large numbers of whom were unemployed as a result of the money reform. In many cases they could not even afford to pay for their children to receive the Hoover food at school.

Heinrich agreed that if food was urgently required for welfare work it would be a crime to store it for a long period. However, he could not give a final decision on the point without consulting the IZD committee.

There was another aspect of the matter : food was provided for IZD camps by the American and Swiss organisations represented at the Askov Conference and these organisations should perhaps be consulted before IZD refused the offer of Food from Denmark.

After considerable general discussion, it was finally agreed that a letter should be written by Herbert Böttger, Secretary of IZD, with a copy to Heinrich, setting out the position and stressing the opinion of the relief teams. The final decision as to how much food should be kept for future IZD camps to be left with IZD.

(Note : Since the Conference, it has been ascertained from Copenhagen that the food was not intended for IZD camps at all : 6 tons of it is allocated to German "Heimkehrer" in Schleswig-Holstein and the remainder is to be stored in Hamburg to be used by the Fredsvenners on a project they will be starting there in the near future. 26.8.48.)

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4.

C.B.S.R.A. Commission

Bill said that during the luncheon break he and John had interviewed the C.B.S.R.A. Commissioner who expressed the opinion that no other voluntary society would be in a position to post teams either in Schleswig, Berlin or Duisburg when I.V.S.P. withdrew on April 1st next. It was probable that all the voluntary societies would be withdrawing some time next year, except perhaps the Salvation Army and the Quakers who might continue to spread their own 'gospel'. It was, therefore, necessary that each team should during the next six months hand over as much of its work as possible to the appropriate German authorities.

John pointed out the present difficult financial position of I.V.S.P. and asked members to supply as much money-raising material as possible in the form of reports, photographs of the work, etc.

5.

Advisory Officer : Terms of Reference

Edith said that, in response to a suggestion from Derek, Unit 4 had drafted terms of reference for the Advisory Officer insofar as his work for the relief teams was concerned, as follows : -

- (a) To maintain regular personal contact with I.V.S.P. Relief Sections in Germany and with C.B.S.R.A. Commission HQ.
- (b) To keep I.V.S.P. Relief Sections in Germany advised of any developments at H.Q.5.affecting them.
- (c) To advise I.V.S.P. Relief Sections in Germany on all questions relating to team personnel and internal affairs relative to I.V.S.P.

John expressed the view that these were the primary functions of A.O. It was obvious that I.Z.D. would increasingly have to stand on its own feet.

Bill pointed out that, when I.Z.D. was arranging its summer camps, there was probably enough work for two people' full-time. The position at the moment was, of course, further complicated by the fact that since the money reform I.Z.D. had lost its funds and was not able to pay for full-time staff. Bill, however, promised to discuss the whole matter with Basil and decide how much of his time should be spent at Vlotho and how much at Duisburg. He would try to obtain the services of a competent secretary who would be able to help I.Z.D. when the relief teams withdrew.

6.

I.Z.D.

Heinrich said that he was very glad to have been afforded the opportunity of attending the conference, and he would like to draw attention to four points in connection with I.Z.D. at the present time, viz.

- (a) the position of I.Z.D. when the I.V.S.P. relief teams withdrew;
- (b) the forthcoming conference of the secretaries of the organisations represented at Askov;
- (c) the problems of I.Z.D. after the money reform;
- (d) the problems in Berlin.

He expressed sincere thanks for the work the teams were doing in Germany and for help and encouragement given to I.Z.D. and he asked John to convey the gratitude of I.Z.D. to the I.V.S.P. committee in London. He was looking forward to a continuation of the co-operation between I.Z.D. and the Advisory Officer, although it was important that I.Z.D. should get accustomed to standing on its own feet in view of the forthcoming withdrawal of the teams. The main difficulty would seem to be the securing of entry and exit permits for volunteers and the establishment of good relations with the authorities.

John thought that it might be a good idea to have one I.V.S.P. representative in Germany to help with the arrangements for the summer camps next year and the Committee would consider this in the light of any advice that Basil might be able to give.

In reply to a question from Elsie as to the growth of I.Z.D., Heinrich said that he personally felt that the money reform had retarded the growth of the movement. Only fifty percent of the volunteers who had applied for service this summer had actually appeared at the camps; this was partly due to the fact that the many volunteers had not been able to afford the railway fares to the camps and also that student volunteers were having to work during their vacations in order to be able to continue their studies next winter. Apart from these reasons, there did appear to be a falling off in numbers; it was obvious that some people had joined I.Z.D. for the sole purpose of visiting other countries and, having had their wishes satisfied, they were no longer interested in I.Z.D. At the present time, it was difficult to raise funds for I.Z.D.; they could not afford to pay a full-time secretary, nor to issue an information bulletin nor even to have a meeting of the working committee, since there was no money for train fares. A meeting of the small working committee would, however, have to be arranged in order to plan future activities. It was likely that the Annual General Meeting would be postponed from October to December, by which time it was hoped that the financial situation would have improved.

Heinrich considered that the money reform had had one valuable effect in causing a decentralisation of the work. Local groups required to be encouraged and Heinrich felt that the groups in Berlin and Freiburg had come through the money reform with the least amount of loss, because they worked as closely-knit units. It was felt, however, that there should be three people in the secretariat who could give a lot of time to the work : Herbert as secretary, one assistant to deal with all the personal correspondence with members and one assistant to deal with entry and exit permits and to plan the whole exchange of volunteers between the various countries.

While appreciating the value of small local groups arranging their own schemes, Elsie said that there might be a danger of such groups losing contact with I.Z.D. headquarters.

John asked how far there was a tendency to increase numbers up to a maximum irrespective of whether volunteers came with the right I.Z.D. spirit. Herbert appeared to be aware of the danger of too rapid growth because of the immediate attractiveness of the idea to so many young people.

Heinrich said that the policy hitherto had been not to discourage anyone from going to a camp, but the committee would now have to review the situation in the light of present financial circumstances. They wanted to get out a bulletin as quickly as possible which would include an appeal to members to give or raise the sum of DM 10,00 each for I.Z.D.

Referring to the position in Berlin, Heinrich said that the Berlin group were anxious to have a legal status there and they had been given a form to complete containing a number of points which must be included in the statutes if the organisation is officially recognised in the British sector. One of the points is that former members of the Nazi Party who have not been de-Nazified must not be members of the organisation. I.Z.D. had never asked members to state what their previous activities had been, but had accepted all who came to camps in good faith, giving them a chance to develop their own characters in the right way. The point was an important one, not only for Berlin, but for the whole of I.Z.D. since there were members of the Intelligence Department who considered I.Z.D. as a rather reactionary organisation.

In reply to a question from Bill, Heinrich said that the regulation in the Western Zones was that anyone who wished to form an organisation must be de-Nazified; this did not prevent former Nazis becoming members. I.Z.D. had not yet been officially registered in the Western Zones although preliminary steps to that end had been taken. The News Bulletin was supposed to be censored, but he did not believe that the last two numbers had been censored.

John expressed the opinion that it was important that the News Bulletin should be approved by the authorities. With regard to the situation in Berlin, John said that every attempt made to further I.Z.D. activities in the Eastern sector of the city had failed and he felt that there could be no possible hope of future success in this direction if the organisation refused to have its members de-Nazified.

Heinrich asked Pegeen whether the registration of the Berlin group as an officially recognised body would help them in contacting the Russians.

Pegeen said that the group wanted to get a licence in the Western sector; if they did not get a licence, they would be working illegally and there had recently been a considerable tightening up on all illegal organisations.

Heinrich pointed out that everything done in Berlin had been done with the full consent of the Education Branch of C.C.G. with whom good relations had been established.

Edith suggested that the whole matter might be discussed by John with Education Branch officials during his forthcoming visit to Berlin, and John readily undertook to do this.

Bill drew attention to a number of complimentary copies of the I.V.S.P. History which were now available for distribution to officials who had shown a particular interest in our work, and he said he would be glad to have the names of any officials whom teams would like to recommend for copies of the History.

Heinrich mentioned the forthcoming conference of work-camp associations to which the secretary and one other member of I.Z.D. had been invited. He felt that it was important for both Basil and Bill also to attend that conference, so that there would be four people representing the work in Germany.

Elsie asked if I.Z.D. had any method in selecting volunteers for camps and whether volunteers were ever turned down as unacceptable.

Heinrich said that the general principle followed was to accept as many volunteers as wished to come. He, personally, was very reluctant to pass judgement on any individual. On the other hand, there had been volunteers who were so difficult that I.Z.D. was not yet strong enough to carry them. If a volunteer was rejected, it should be done not as a personal criticism of that volunteer but rather as a reflection on the present weakness of the organisation.

Fred mentioned two recommendations which were put forward by a camp in Belgium which he had attended last year, viz.

- (a) that the individual volunteer should receive a copy of the report made about him;
- (b) a volunteer should be given the chance of serving in four camps before a decision as to his suitability as a member was made.

Heinrich considered that if members were allowed to see the reports made on them, those reports might be weakened. The system in I.Z.D. was that all reports were sent to the Secretary and anybody could apply to the Secretary to see his own report if he wished to do so.

Jim said that in some cases it might be very embarrassing to a volunteer to see the report made about him; it would be better for the Secretary to pass on to the volunteer the gist of the report in general terms in a letter.

This was generally agreed and it was felt that it could be recommended to I.V.S.P.

John expressed thanks to Heinrich for coming to the conference and giving the members present a picture of I.Z.D. and its current problems.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was closed.