

INTERNATIONALER ZIVILDIENTST  
I Z D

Report on the work of IZD – October 1947 to October 1948 – Germany

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There is no need to emphasise the abnormal background against which the international work-camps in Germany have to be seen. Germany is still an occupied country, and that in itself presents a problem for the "foreign" volunteers on the services to identify themselves completely with the German volunteers, especially if they are members of the occupying powers themselves. It means, too, that though the camps are organised entirely by the German Internationaler Zivildienst, they still need to negotiate with the occupying powers through the medium of British or American volunteers.

Again, it is a fact which has to be faced that perhaps fewer German volunteers come to camps with a convinced "constructive attitude towards peace" than come to camps in other countries with a long SCI tradition. Also to be reckoned with is the abnormally high percentage of young women among the German population of today. And finally, the most outstanding factor in the year's work in Germany has been the currency reform which took place just before the opening of the summer camps.

The currency reform, three weeks before the camps were due to open meant that virtually all previous plans for camps had to be scrapped, and negotiations started afresh for new ones. The volunteers, lined up ready to come, had suddenly to re-adjust their whole lives and in most cases, to decide not to come. These who could come did not know what camps, if any, would be run. Extreme shortage of money brought postal and telegraphic communication between the secretariat and the membership to a standstill. The only stable factor, and the one which compelled the secretariat to open camps at all costs, was that of the arrival of some 150 volunteers from abroad.

It became gradually clear that 50% of the German volunteers who had originally volunteered to come, could not come, so that every new applicant, whether young or old, man or woman, new to the movement or not, was accepted without question. Consequently, in many cases, the camps were overloaded with too many women volunteers, too many over-young volunteers, and too many inexperienced volunteers.

In addition, a large proportion of the foreign volunteers were also women and a large proportion of them were also inexperienced in IZD or in work-camps. The latter factor threw the full weight of responsibility for creating the "atmosphere" of the camp upon those volunteers, and especially those German volunteers who had already some experience – a good, constructive task, but one which they were not always quite strong enough to carry through.

Undoubtedly the IZD secretariat could in the more normal conditions of the future try to select its volunteers with that amount of care which it is obviously desirable to have; and it is also entitled to expect a stricter sense of discipline from its members.

Another point which may help other branches in other lands, is that a great deal of misunderstanding could be avoided in future if the system of writing reports were explained to volunteers from the very beginning of camps.

Services were held during the year in Berlin and all zones, except the Russian. The attached table shows details of these camps. The summer Youth camp had to be cancelled owing to the currency reform.

A large number of German IZD volunteers went to camps abroad, both at Easter and during the summer. Of the latter there were 47 who went to 8 different countries : England 12; Switzerland 11; France 11; Sweden 5; Holland 4; Norway 2; Austria 1; Italy .1

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So many difficulties meant that no camp was by any means perfect, but the work was in all cases well done, and altogether the opportunities for learning by mistakes, and by approaching the difficulties in the spirit of willing service, made the camps without any doubt really worthwhile. From the many letters of thanks and praise and of positive criticism which came from volunteers after the camps ended, there was no doubt that camp-life was an experience which few will forget over the years, and though it may not be a visible difference which is produced, it can safely be said that the volunteers would certainly have been the poorer had they not been on service.

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