

FOREIGN WORKERS IN GERMAN CAMPS

At the conference of work-camp organisations in Blaricum it was decided that campers who had spent a certain specified time in camps abroad would be allowed to take a period of holiday in order to broaden their contact with the country and the people. We wrote to Lt.Col. Andrews, the chief of the Education Branch of the British Control Commission in Germany (and a very good friend of the work-camp movement) asking his permission to apply this rule to Germany. His reply was :

'As you observed in your letter, the whole question of visitors being allowed to come to Germany during this coming summer is now under active consideration at a high level. There seems to be no doubt whatever that some sort of tourist traffic will be allowed. I think, however, that we had better wait for the result of these considerations before finalising any ideas with regard to foreign volunteers of IVSP staying in Germany for a week or ten days after they have completed their voluntary service work.'

In view of this decision it would be as well we make clear once more the standing of foreign campers who visit Germany. The whole programme of work-camps in Germany has the sponsorship and active help of the Education and Youth departments in the three western Zones. We have to thank these departments

- (a) that we are allowed to hold camps at all
- (b) that foreigners may come in and Germans go to other countries
- (c) for making the process of getting visas, exit Permits, and so on, much easier than it would otherwise be.

In a world of bureaucracy it is good to find active sympathy and help which often goes much farther than the mere efficient carrying out of routine job. From the side of the Education departments the keynote has always been friendship and co-operation; and this is a convenient place to consider how we, on our side, can reciprocate this co-operation – and at the same time help to make the organisation of our camps easier and more effective.

At present, all foreigners visiting Germany must be sponsored by some Branch of the Military Government. Our volunteers are sponsored by the Education Branches. That means that the Education authorities take the responsibility of saying to Military Government that the campers are desirable people who come here to do a job of work. Their permits are issued on that understanding, for a specified period of time which has been agreed between the volunteers and the two national secretariats involved. Our English representative in Germany sends the names of all volunteers to the Control Commission, and in so doing represents SCI as recommending those volunteers to Military Government as suitable people.

All this involves a good deal of paper work. On the one hand, Education Branch, and the other government departments involved, insist on certain formalities. For instance, we must supply each month a list of all volunteers who have come and gone to each camp. Also, the organisation of the camps, from our side, is not straight forward; and careful advance planning is necessary to ensure the right proportion of different kinds of volunteers in each camp. It is, therefore, very important that exact arrangements should be made beforehand for the visits of the volunteers, and that the volunteers should keep scrupulously to these arrangements.

The job of the national secretariats is to organise efficiently the camps and the visits of the volunteers. The first duty of a volunteer is to co-operate in these arrangements. The following remarks are addressed to volunteers :

You have offered service for a stated period; your own national secretary has offered your service to Germany for that period, and Germany has planned the number and constitution of the camps in accordance with the number of volunteers available. A quantity of practical and paper work has been done in order that you should be able to do a certain job of work for a certain time. There should, normally, be no reason why these arrangements should be altered. If, however, you find that you must alter them, please make previous arrangements with your national secretary, who is responsible for you to the German Branch. And when you come to Germany remember that Education Branch is willing to sponsor you only while you are on work-camp; so that it is both illegal and dishonourable to leave the camp without permission.

The following list of some of the irregularities which occurred in Germany last year will give you some idea of how difficult efficient organisation becomes, and how good relations may be strained, when individuals turn their period of service into a pleasuretrip.

A volunteer :

- finds he likes a camp and decides to stay longer than the agreed period.
- does not like a camp and leaves early, either to go home or to another camp.
- travels about from one camp to another without previous permission.
- leaves the camp for a while to travel or visit friends.
- sends his passport to an English relief team asking for an extension of visa.
- goes himself to the local Permit Office and has his visa extended.
- overstays his visa and asks later for an extension.
- does not come to Germany at all, and no-one in Germany is informed.
- travels about until his money is gone: then asks for money to get home.

These are some of the complications! To go into the various remedies and duties of the volunteer would be tedious. The answer is easy : if each volunteer comes to Germany to offer a service – to serve rather than to enjoy – he will automatically do all those acts of co-operation which make the organising of camps easier and the spirit of friendship between SCI and Control Commission brighter.