

- B E R L I N V I S I T -

MARCH 12 - 17, 1949

OBJECTS OF VISIT

To discuss arrangements for the pulling out of the IVSP team at the end of March and to study the situation and needs of the IZD Group and its plans for the summer.

THE DIARY

Saturday	March 12.	Leave Duisburg 07.42 Arrive Berlin Billet about 21.30
Sunday	March 13.	Morning : Recovering from journey. Afternoon : Motor trip to Russian Sector with Nan and Reg. Evening : Visit to Jugendhaus with Nan and Reg.
Monday	March 14.	Morning : Visits to CCG offices with Reg. Afternoon : Clerical work. Evening : Discussed equipment, etc., with Reg.
Tuesday	March 15.	Morning : Joint meeting of Berlin Relief Teams. Afternoon : Visits to CCG office with Reg. Evening : Visit with Pegeen to Franzkowiak's house for singing evening with some IZD members.
Wednesday	March 16.	Morning : Visit with Reg and Dieter Hartwich to assistant Youth Officer, British Zone, for advice on Registration of IZD in Berlin. Talk with Dieter. Afternoon : Visit to Nachbarschaftsheim with Reg. Evening : Visit with Reg to Cinema.
Thursday	March 17.	Leave Billet 10.00 Arrive Duisburg 21.00

It will be convenient to report, not chronologically, but under the following headings :

- General impressions of Berlin
- Team business
- Nachbarschaftsheim
- Jugendhof
- IZD business.

GENERAL IMPRESSIONS OF BERLIN

These are necessarily superficial, but the stranger's-eye-view is often interesting. Probably the most striking feature of the city is its wonderful main roads - very wide and straight with one-way lanes divided by a broad centre-strip. The Kaiserdamm, which sweeps from the edge of the city broad and straight right into the centre is probably unequalled in the world. The next impression - to the motorist, at least - might be the suicidal tendencies to the Berlin pedestrians, none of whom would survive five minutes of Piccadilly.

Driving from Gatow airport, through lovely wooded country dotted with large lakes, one passes through the better-class residential area - not badly damaged - and reaches the extensive central area of monotonous blocks of flats, and finally the Tiergarten - now almost denuded of trees and a depressing sight with its ugly allotments and fantastic, isolated statues like ghosts of former heroes.

The centre of the city is badly damaged, with large areas of empty shells of tall apartment houses whose high naked walls seem to be very precariously balanced. In contrast to the condition of most German towns, a very great deal of rubble clearance has been done. It is unusual to find rubble over the pavement; instead there are piles of old salvaged bricks, either laid in neat walls or thrown on colossal piles. The shortage of fuel and raw materials since the blockade has caused much unemployment, and the unemployed are put to work clearing the debris and pulling down the unrepairable buildings.

As in other towns, the larger shops of Berlin show today a brave selection of many kinds of goods; but the prices are high for ordinary people.

If you continue your drive eastwards you find yourself in the Russian Sector. Recovering quickly from your surprise - and perhaps a little disappointed - you look around for a Russian. You do eventually see someone in unfamiliar uniform, but he might just as well be a German policeman for all you know.

You are now in Unter den Linden, and many of the famous buildings are close by; but they are all in sad condition. A little farther east the industrial area begins; it has the same monotonous blocks of flats as the western portion, but is more dilapidated and dismal - not a dismal, however, as London's East End.

Travel between the east and west Sectors is free to all, but Germans are not allowed to bring goods out of the Russian Sector. Parcels of outgoing pedestrians or passengers are examined at the border. Many people live in the east and work in the west - and vice versa. At present both East- and Westmarks are accepted in the Western Sectors; but Eastmarks will probably soon be banned. Since the exchange rate, theoretically equal, is three or Eastmarks to one Westmark, the person who works in the east Sector and lives in the west will be badly hit: he cannot buy goods in the Russian Sector and bring them over; and if he exchange his money his wage drops to a third or a quarter of its value.

In our travels we have crossed Berlin's river - the Spree - several times. It is a poor little river by London standards; every petty side-road throws a cheeky bridge over it. There is no pride and glory in it at all: it winds its way humbly between bedraggled and tough-looking houses as if expecting a snub, and escapes as soon as it can into the lakes to the West.

All this time planes have been droning overhead, and we are already blasé and hardly notice them.

One of the afflictions of Berlin life is the fuel shortage. Electric current is available four hours a day - hours which vary in different districts. If you are lucky you have light in the evening: if not, you may have two hours in the afternoon and two in the small hours - and if there is no-one at home during the day and you have an electric cooker, you may have to get up at three o'clock in the morning to cook the day's meals. Heating-fuel, too, is very scarce.

Outwardly, Berlin is much less exciting than one would expect from the newspapers. For if not, let the opposite be the case: then the newspapers have not made the most of their chances - which is absurd. One can only guess the effect on the long-suffering population of continual tension and insecurity; and the less said about that by a stranger the better.

### TEAM BUSINESS

The technical details of pulling out are of no general interest. The welfare work in the British Sector was done by three teams - Friends Service Council, Salvation Army and IVSP - who worked very closely together; so that the work will not come to an end when IVSP leaves. The joint meeting referred to in the diary was a routine meeting and will be reported in the usual way in the official minutes. Reg Thikins, the team leader, will continue to work in Berlin until August, with the F.S.C. team.

Needless to say, the team's departure will be regretted by many German friends, not the least by the IZD Group, of whom more later. A pleasant feature of life in the Billet is the spontaneous visiting by IZD friends which speaks highly for the team's hospitality over a long period. A certain amount of IVSP equipment will be left behind by the team for the use of the Group.

#### NACHBARSCHAFTSHEIM (NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE)

During the last year's summer camp in Berlin the volunteers dismantled a very large wooden hut in one part of the city and transferred it to the poor district of Neukölln, where they dug the foundations for its re-erection. All who took part will be very pleased to know that the Centre was opened towards the end of the year - very good progress under such conditions - and that the work of SCI is remembered with gratitude. Interior decoration is not yet finished, but thick cement interior walls have been built which divide the building into many rooms. Various kinds of social activities take place. Margaret Day, the American woman who has carried out the whole project, told us a touching story which, although not directly connected with the Heim, is a fine example of the spirit which the Heim seeks to foster. A number of men have returned to Neukölln from captivity in Russia. In spite of poverty, ill-health and difficult personal and social problems, a number of them have formed a group to help the families of those local men who are still in captivity or missing and to try to trace these men. To anyone who has seen the sad conditions of prisoners who return from the east, this is an amazing story. With such material in the neighbourhood the Heim should be a great success.

#### JUGENDHOF

This new idea (for Germany) in the treatment of delinquent youth came from the American Welfare department. The Jugendhof is a small ex-concentration camp in the American Sector, consisting of some half-dozen single-storied wooden buildings and one multi-storied brick building. Here are some 250 lads between 14 and 21 years of age who have got on the wrong side of the law. In the years of squalor and hunger and cold that followed the war they learned from their parents or friends to pinch a piece of wood here, a lump of coal there, to deal on the Black Market; and generally to snatch what they could from the rubbish-heap of Berlin's economic life. So here they are in prison - a most pathetic crew. Nearly all of them have the stamp of innocence still, and given the right environment there is no reason at all why they should not become good citizens. The leader of the Jugendhof and his staff do their best for the lads : they are mostly ordinary, kindly chaps, and the boys take to them as to older brothers. But they work under great handicaps.

Newcomers, hard cases, and doubtful cases of all kinds are locked in the only hut whose windows are barred. Here live, at present, over 70 lads. On the afternoon of our visit about thirty of them were amusing themselves in a smallish room which contained nothing but simple tables and benches, a stove and a loudspeaker. The loudspeaker is connected to the camp radio set, but the current was off at the time. Like every room in every hut, this one was very dingy and bare. The whole camp is dreary and dilapidated. Until last week there were no brooms to sweep the floors - then two were got from the Americans. When we entered the room the boys crowded around us, evidently glad of distraction. They seemed cheerful enough - but what a crew! They ranged from 14 to 21 - innocent youngsters for the most part, but there were one or two queer-looking characters amongst them. All were poorly dressed. Very few have a change of clothing none, I think, a towel. Soap is very scarce : to keep clean is quite impossible. It is doubtful whether many of them have ever owned a tooth-brush.

We saw the bedrooms. The beds were of various kinds - two storied, camp beds, and so on. Mattresses and blankets look dirty - some definitely are. There are no sheets. A number of the lads are bed-wetters : how the bedclothes get washed I don't know : probably they don't - we saw stains on mattresses and floor.

In the other huts the lads are free to come and go inside and out. There are camp duties to be done, and schooling is given one day a week - more to special cases.

All the trustworthy lads are allowed home on alternate week-ends - provided that their homes are suitable. The camp is surrounded by barbed wire - a legacy from its past - but coming and going through the gaps is easy. The escapes number about twenty a month, but the successes apparently justify the failures. Later on, work is found for the lads with firms in the district : they return to camp in the evening, but live in the brick house and are allowed to retain part of their wage. When they are finally discharged they must report from time to time as a check on their behaviour.

A new and better camp has been found, and some of the lads are already working at the preparation. The Berlin IZD Group plans a six-week summer camp to help in the work : this will be referred to later. Some of the lads have already worked with the Group in the week-end stump-grubbing scheme.

It should be mentioned that, although the idea of the Jugendhof came from American Welfare, the camp itself is completely under German administration. Berlin, like every other German town, is frightfully poor : in all welfare schemes the cry is always : money, money, money.

The camp leader told us about a boy who, while living in the barred and locked building, swallowed a razor-blade. He was rushed to hospital, but seemed to take the matter very lightly. He had, it appeared, often swallowed razor-blades to earn a few coppers and had not, apparently been any the worse. In this case, however, his motive was that he had been told that he would soon be moved out of the locked hut into one of the open ones; and this he did not want. It seems that he was so sick of being pushed about, tired, cold and hungry in the outside world that the prison was a refuge to him, and even the relatively small freedom of the other huts was to great a threat to his peace of mind.

Home-life in Germany has been hard hit since the war. It has failed these lads. The only substitute is some kind of institution which will give them some sort of affection and community spirit. Will the Jugendhof be able to do this for the delinquent youth of Berlin?

#### THE IZD GROUP

The Berlin IZD Group members about 60, of whom some 30 are active members. The average age is very low. There is a nucleus of sound, enthusiastic leaders, but these are mostly students with other demands on their time. For this and other reasons mentioned later the German Branch and, indeed, the whole of SCI has special obligations towards the Group.

The withdrawal of the IVSP team makes it essential that the group shall be registered with the authorities, Civil and Military, as an approved society: otherwise its activities will be completely illegal. This was made clear at the interview with Miss Joan Bullinger, assistant to Mr. Berenson, Youth Officer of the British Sector. Application has already been made for registration in the British Zone (i.e. Western Germany) and the Berlin Group will apply very shortly for registration in whole of Western Berlin (i.e. the three Sectors simultaneously). I asked Miss Bullinger if there was any danger that the Russian authorities would be prejudiced against IZD if it were officially authorised by the western powers, and if any difficulties would result to the Group members who live in the Russian Sector. Her opinion was that the mere act of registration was not likely to have much effect on whatever opinion was already held. It was, she thought, not advisable, to send literature into the Russian Sector or the Russian Zone, and one should be careful what was mentioned in letters. Reg said that certain people who had received letters referring to IZD had been questioned by the police in the Russian Zone. As an illustration of the difficulties of working in the Russian Zone, Reg mentioned that the German Quakers must carry on their welfare work through an organisation which includes various religious and political groups but which is, naturally, strongly under communist influence. They are allowed to distribute food supplied by foreign Quakers and to announce its origin.

The American Friends Service Committee has kindly invited a member of IZD to take part in the work camp in USA during the summer. IZD has offered the place to the Berlin Group, provided that a suitable representative can be found.

During the winter the Group has, with the support of the team, carried out week-end work schemes. They dug up a number of tree-stumps and cut them up into firewood for old people. A few lads from the Jugendhof had taken part in the work.

As last year, the Group plans a summer camp. This will last for 6 weeks. The work will be repair and preparation of buildings to be used as cookhouse and cultural centre in the new camp to which the Jugendhof is to move. There are several problems involved, which are nearly all due to Berlin's unique position. In the camp of last year the gap between the somewhat young Berliners and the foreigners was not bridged as easily as it might have been. A lad who is now eighteen was only eight years old at the beginning of the war. Its background is so very different from that of a foreigner that no little effort is needed on both sides to find common ground for friendship over a period of weeks. If, as happened last year, there are both Berliners and foreigners who have never before been on a SCI camp, the cement of the SCI spirit and interests may be lacking; and the age difference will make matters still more difficult. This year, in addition to these obstacles, we have the problem of fraternising with the Jugendhof lads - during recreational as well as working hours. This calls for special qualities in the volunteers : a certain maturity and spiritual stability together with a real and spontaneous interest in activities which will interest the youngsters; a good knowledge of the workcamp movement as a whole and a desire to spread the gospel; and above all a genuine desire to serve.

The next problem is to find a suitable leader. It is likely that those Group members qualified to lead a camp will be too busy to take part; so a leader must be found from outside. For many reasons a German would be preferred. The clerical work and correspondence with the Secretariat, the technical arrangements concerning the work; and the contact with the Jugendhof lads and the Berlin members can only be done properly by someone with a good knowledge of German - preferably, too, someone who can stay the full length of the camp. This would involve flying someone over to Berlin and back, which costs £ 10. We are hoping to receive again a grant from the AFSC travel fund, which could be used for this purpose, but this would mean that one less volunteer could be flown out of Berlin to attend foreign camps. On the other hand, the money could be saved by appointing as leader some foreign volunteers who was going to the camp in any case. The problem remains open.

The Jugendhof has offered to provide food for the camp, and we have still a number of C.A.R.E. packets which were flown over last year. It may be necessary, however, to send more food - if permission can be got to send it by air. The available diet might prove inadequate for foreign volunteers - particularly the shortage of fresh food.

Dieter Hartwich, with whom I discussed these problems, made a suggestion which, although contrary to a Blaricum decision, is worth considering in the special case of Berlin : that a combined AFSC - SCI camp should be held. Since the scheme is already in the American Sector, AFSC would already command facilities available to no one else. And it is true to say that in IZD generally, and more so in Berlin, the desire for camps is greater than the ability to organise them satisfactorily. (the answer to this, again, is probably - money!). Obviously, outside help is needed; but whether this should come from AFSC or from SCI is another matter. AFSC can supply a certain amount of money, certainly, and leaders and organisers suitable for its own particular Kind of camp. And my own opinion is (and I think Dieter agreed) that for many young people in Germany (and elsewhere) who are looking for something to believe in a camp with a religious basis may be more fruitful than a poor SCI camp whose motif is (and should remain) Opferbereitschaft. This thought may be at the heart of the question of the exact status and value of the different work-camp organisations. SCI cannot give such people what they are looking for : camps with a religious foundation. Perhaps SCI should confine its membership strictly to those who are already inspired (via AFSC for example) and who wish to do nothing but to offer service: than it can put the shovel into their hands.

Leaving the problems of the summer camp, the Berlin Group owns a Nissen Hut which was given them by the IVSP team. They wish to erect it to provide storage room for their gear and a centre for activities. The difficulty here is ... again ... "Money!" says the girl at the back. Quite right, my dear!

An estimate is being prepared of the cost of erection and of renting of a groundsite (a) with and (b) without concrete foundation and cellar. The site with foundation may have to be taken because cement cannot be got. The cellar just happens to be attached to the foundation in question. If the cost is beyond the means of the Group, and if IZD itself cannot help, perhaps other Branches would be willing to contribute.

From the SCI point of view, two complementary things struck me during the visit : firstly, that we outside know very little of the difficulties of the Berlin Group; secondly, that the Berlin Group does not know as much as it should about the events in the outside work-camp world. The same is true, I am sure, of every Group in every country; but, whereas other groups may be left to their own and the secretariats' devices, Berlin's problems cannot be completely solved even by the concerted action of all Branches, let alone by IZD alone. If it does happen that Berlin becomes part of the Russian Zone our little Group may be the light of SCI shining in the wilderness - and who can say that it might not, at some time of crisis, be the little extra weight that turns the scale in the right direction? Berlin is one of our outposts, and it is up to us to see that the garrison does not run short of ammunition.

To this end I suggest that a member be appointed from the British Zone to represent Berlin on the IZD Ausschuß. This duties would be :

- To keep such contact with Berlin that he can speak for the Group and give its point of view as if he were actually a Berliner.
- To keep SCI as a whole informed about the situation and problems of Berlin, and to keep Berlin informed of the events in the work-camp world.
- Generally, to accept responsibility for the welfare of the Berlin Group and the degree of co-operation between Berlin and the rest of the movement, which is necessary to promote that welfare.

Bill Bowman

RS 150 / IVSP,  
Duisburg, BAOR 4,  
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