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INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE FOR PEACE

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The Relief Teams Leave Germany

The IVSP Relief Teams have left Germany. Heinrich Carstens, the Vice-Chairman of the Internationaler Zivildienst, has written the following appreciation of their work.

Hamburg-Blankenese
March 29th, 1949.

When one fine day in 1946, I found myself in the company of a dozen or so other Hamburg people waiting for the IVSP Advisory Officer, I hadn't really much of a notion what IVSP stood for. Moreover, when I saw the chap entering the room, wearing a long beard, I did have some slight doubts and suspicions lest we had fallen into the hands of a fanatic or a world reformer of sort (I hope to be forgiven for my unfaltering conviction that an Englishman must needs be clean-shaven). The way, however, our friend talked to us, expounding IVSP's aims and their plans for organising international work camps at K ohlbrand and at other places during the summer months, did make sense; finally, the K ohlbrand service itself more than held what had been promised to us.

From that time on I have been highly privileged to make the acquaintance of many members of the IVSP relief teams. More than once I have been their guest in Berlin, Duisburg and Schleswig, thus getting first-hand glimpses of their work and of their life. I recall one particular night in Berlin during the bitter cold of the winter, 1946/47. After a busy day of rushing hither and thither, attending to various jobs and activities, like clothing distribution, student feeding scheme, committee meeting, etc., etc., the "family" sat down rather worn out and listless, for the dinner. There wasn't much of a conversation to start with; but by and by they began to report of their work, talking of what they been able to achieve and of the day's disappointments. The stock of warm clothes for old people and for

refugees was rapidly dwindling down; when could new supplies be expected? They would have to try out 20 new recipes for Soya flour to determine the best way of using it in child feeding. One member reported that he had "scrounged" so-and-so many rejected tyres from an Army unit.

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Oh boy, how wonderful ! how many pairs of soles for children's shoes would they make and at what earliest possible date could they be collected? The heap of empty cigarette boxes would soon be large enough to be taken to a children's home, to be converted into all sorts of games, houses, railroads, and what not. Before dinner was over, the whole room was seething with new energy, new laughing, plans, projects, hopes and fears. Ever since this day this never-tiring spirit of enthusiasm and devotion, in spite of real mountains of material difficulties, human insufficiencies and personal disappointments, has filled my heart with deep gratitude for all those who brought us help, hope and renewed faith in our country's darkest days of misery and prostration.

What would have become of the Internationaler Zivildienst (German branch of SCI, formed in 1946) in Germany had it not been for the three IVSP relief teams and for their Advisory Officer? It might not have sprung up at all; certainly, it would not have been able to grow as it did, without their spiritual and material support. Foreign volunteers would have found it impossible to come to our camps if the IVSP Advisory Officer hadn't smoothed away innumerable obstacles for them; likewise, no German could have attended a service or a conference in other countries without his help. Think of all the material support by way of food, clothing, tools, transport, and the like; then try to assess the spiritual help and moral sustenance we have had throughout these three an a half years.

All three teams have emulated to give us their very best; yet, personalities, circumstances and conditions have prompted distinctive differences between them. Berlin have had their regular stump-grubbing, weekend services in the Grunewald, their singing, games and discussions at Karolingerplatz or at the Mittelhof. Schleswig have covered a large area promoting and sustaining local groups at places 50 and more miles apart; to carry out a weekend service meant chasing about in a van to collect volunteers in various parts of the country before the camp could start. Duisburg members have had their own troubles and sorrows with IZD. Their billet has served as a kind of hostel to many friends of many nationalities; they provided us with storage room, housed our secretariat at one time, helped out with transport at all our camps in the Ruhr district, and rendered innumerable services, both great and small, to our nearby secretariat.

Don't believe that I have mentioned all the varieties of help we have had from IVSP in Germany; it would be difficult to list them all. But the very best of it is this : no matter how ticklish our problems, we could always rely on finding a sympathetic hearing with any member of the teams, and, sure enough, their devotion, resource-fullness and tenacity would find a solution to our troubles.

At this moment, when the relief teams of IVSP are withdrawing from Germany, my thoughts are directed in gratitude to what I have come to call a modern miracle. Soon after the war ended, British volunteers left their homes and their jobs to come to the help of people in need and distress in Germany. After some time, they took up work in the Friedland refugee camp near Göttingen. A number of students of Göttingen University had also felt urged to leave their study books for the time being in order to help the old and the sick who kept pouring into Friedland camp from Eastern districts.

Unselfishness, pity and love stirred in the hearts of members of both groups. What was more natural than that these British and German voluntary helpers should meet, and, after some time, agree to combine their strength and their efforts. To the end of the world a good deed will bring forth good results. Out of the two Friedland services, quite unintentionally, there was re-born in Germany : International Voluntary Service for Peace.

Heinrich Carstens

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