



LE SERVICE CIVIL

MITTEILUNGEN DER INTERN. ZIVILDIENTST-VEREINIGUNG
BULLETIN DE L'ASSOCIATION DU SERVICE CIVIL INTERN.

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REPORTS FROM SERVICES

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Germany

DONAUESCHINGEN 24.7. - 17. 9.

At Donaueschingen I.Z.D. co-operated with another organisation, the Nothelfergemeinschaft, to help in the construction of houses for refugees and other needy families. Largely through the vigorous action of the « Landrat » of the district, the land for these houses was given by the town authorities, much of the material was secured at reduced prices and transported free of charge and a great deal of the work was voluntary (local officials, office workers and labourers have all given of their free time). The volunteers write : « It is wonderful to be working on a project that is desperately needed, in which the entire community is united, and where the work is hard but varied, with good working conditions . . . The ground is very hard but everyone works with enthusiasm and determination . . . Our main job was to dig out the cellars and spread the earth, each cellar being 19 x 9 meters and over 1 meter deep. With the aid of wheelbarrows and trucks on rails about 250 tons of earth were removed from each hole. We also spend considerable time filling the mixer and barrowing concrete for the foundations and lower walls. Other jobs included unloading materials, mixing mortar, laying bricks and helping with the roof and inner construction of one house. By the end, the last 5 cellars had been excavated (of the ten houses planned) and 5 more concrete forms with inner walls had risen from the fields where the corn was standing a few weeks before. The most interesting feature of the service was perhaps our co-operation with the other group of voluntary workers (16 German and 4 foreign), the Nothelfergemeinschaft. The number of I.Z.D. volunteers varied from 14 to over 30. For the first two weeks we were too busy absorbing our own newcomers to mix much with the other group but afterwards, with an evening together at least once a week, individual contacts and joint socials and

excursions, very happy and personal relationships were established. On the job, too, we worked in close co-operation. In our social evenings we were often joined by the families of the refugees.

49 11 01 - 1 02

Group discussions suffered from lack of experience and adequate translation. Visits to the swimming baths, 4 kilometers away, and to the cinema were free, perhaps too free . . . In the beginning we attempted to do too much work and, as many of the volunteers, though willing, were young and inexperienced, we modified our efforts a little. This raised the question of emphasis on work. Many of the volunteers were very concerned about the personal, intellectual, artistic and spiritual side of camp life. The influence of the older, more experienced and foreign volunteers was much valued and it is a pity it was so limited.

The service was not an easy one, but we certainly did some useful work, and learned much, too. Most people felt that it was a good service and were loath to leave. »

BERLIN 1.8. - 10. 9.

The service in Berlin was organised to help the « Jugendhof », or boys' reform school, of Berlin, and for many of the volunteers the contact with these young people was the most interesting aspect of the service. An experienced S.C.I. volunteer writes :

« This service is something new in the history of S.C.I., in that we are working together with 20 - 30 youths who are serving a period in the reform school. Except for the work the youths are free to come and go as they wish. Sometimes they run away but usually they come back again after a few days, though they complain about many things, especially that they only receive one Mark per week as pocket money in return for their work. Naturally this low rate of pay is not much of an encouragement to increase their output, but the financial resources of the Berlin authorities make it impossible to increase it at present. Their contact with I.Z.D., the fact of working together with the volunteers to clear the ruins and build a new school has undoubtedly brought a new interest to their monotonous and loveless lives. Their faces are becoming visibly more open and happy. Whereas in the beginning many of them were very doubtful whether it was really worth while cleaning bricks for so little pay, which often did not even make it possible for them to go home at the week-end, most of them now have caught something of the enthusiasm of our I.Z.D. volunteers. There is no lack of work : the ruined walls must all be pulled down in preparation for the new buildings. There is suitable work for the girls, too, as all the bricks have to be cleaned ready for use again.

Unfortunately, a number of friends who hoped to take part in the service were unable to obtain permits to enter Berlin. About half the members of our group are Berliners, the other half being made up of foreigners, a few Germans from the western zones and a few from the eastern zone.

. . . Because of this, political discussions here are deeper and more lively than I have known elsewhere in Germany. In spite of this, the spirit in the group has been very happy. »

« At yesterday evening's meeting of the Berlin group it was decided that the group would continue to take an interest in the « Jugendhof » by organising joint week-end services and evening gatherings. » This service promises thus to have an interesting and valuable « following-up ».

GÖTTINGEN 1.8. - 24. 9.

The local group of I.Z.D. in Göttingen saw urgent work which they felt they should undertake. The national committee, while agreeing on the importance of the work, had already committed itself to as many services as it felt able to carry out adequately. The Göttingen group was therefore authorised to undertake the service if it could accept the full responsibility : organisation, finance, food, lodging etc. . . . The following extracts give us some idea of how they met this challenge. « On the outskirts of the town of Göttingen, a group of six masons, some of the refugees, others bombed out, are building in the evenings, in their free time, three double houses for their families. One is already up to the roof and the brick work of the second is finished. For the last two weeks our team has been busy digging the foundations for the third.

Work begins at 7 o'clock and continues until 4.30, with an hour's break at 12.30. 1.30 is the critical moment of the day! We are very lucky in our food supplies, and in our headsister who produces excellent meals which satisfy our large appetites, but make it hard to leave the lunch table!

49 11 01 - 1 03

In the morning five of us do paid work for the town authorities, digging trenches for water pipes; otherwise our treasury would soon be empty! In the afternoon we all work together digging foundations. Our headsister has opened an informal Kindergarten for some 15 - 20 children who were always around our quarters, and there are earnest discussions on different educational methods. We have a lot of visits, often from people who helped us with the preparation of the service, and many interesting conversations. »

« Finally, one word about the spirit of the group. The feeling that this service had been initiated and maintained by the efforts of the group itself, has strengthened very greatly the feeling of unity within it. Primitive living conditions and simple food do not daunt the volunteers one whit; the positive and urgent nature of the work justifies these unaccustomed living conditions. Neither do individual « problem children » within the group take on undue importance! We hope that in these last weeks this sense of unity in the group will become even deeper and that the S.C.I. service in Göttingen will remain an unforgettable experience for all of us. »

MUNICH 24.7. - 3. 9.

The summer service in Munich was the continuation of the work done in an Easter service, help to a Bavarian Youth Work Organisation. Rubble and ruins were cleared to prepare for the installation of workshops and living quarters for young apprentices.

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A small service was organised in Köln from September 24th to October 11th. We shall report on it in the next number.

Sarre

HÜHNERFELD 11.7. - 17. 9.

Rapid industrial development and, even more, the last war, have produced in the Sarre a desperate housing situation. Thousands of people have no solid roof over their heads, others live in the most deplorable conditions. In Hühnerfeld, a small mining town of some 4.500 inhabitants about 15 miles from Sarrebruck, the inhabitants have united, regardless of religious or political differences, to form a sort of co-operative, to build together houses for themselves. Each member must furnish 3.000 hours work, and pay for the materials of his own house; the first houses to be built will be for those whose need is greatest.

These are the people for and with whom the group of S.C.I. volunteers worked. One of them writes : « Close contact with the local population has quickly been established, because we are working together with them. We are convinced that, on any service, the work must be the uniting factor, that it is, indeed the thing which gives the whole service its meaning. The miners come before or after their shift in the mine to work on the building for four hours, and we have arranged our daily programme so that we can work with them. There are usually over 30 of us working together — villagers and S.C.I. — not to mention the crowds of children and retired miners who follow all our operations with the keenest interest ! It is a real joy for us to see the houses rising out of the ground. Since we have been here the walls of 4 single houses have reached the first floor; the masons are working on a fifth — for two families this time — and we are digging the foundations for two more. In the afternoon we sometimes help to make cement blocks (average 400 per day). This work is indeed satisfying — even when the ground we are digging is exceptionally hard. »

One other brief extract, written towards the end of the service : « Our relations towards the community are still most cordial. On Saturdays most of us are invited to visit individual families. This

both gives us an insight into social conditions and offers an opportunity to spread our ideas more widely Our group has in this last time become very closely united. And still we try to share even more fully all our ideas and feelings. »

49 11 01 - 1 04

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PRÜM

In the last few years S.C.I. has been, more and more, planning its services far ahead. The national secretaries, at their autumn meeting, decide how many services S.C.I. will try to undertake in each country in the following year; then the national committees have the responsibility for deciding where those services will be, where S.C.I. can best meet a real need in their country.

We believe that by this advance planning we can use most fully and effectively the offers of service coming from places as far apart as Finland and Algeria, California and Austria. But it would be tragic, indeed, if this planning made us unable or unwilling to respond to a sudden emergency call. If our desire to « organise » our activities had such an effect, most of us would feel that S.C.I. had ceased to be S.C.I.

When, in July, an ammunition dump exploded in the town of Prüm, near Bonn, causing very serious damage, the German branch of S.C.I. felt that it must go to the help of this community and, although they already had four services running, by the 5th of August a small group was starting work in Prüm.

The need was certainly great : «The town is in a sorry state. The war went through it twice and the explosion occurred before many of the ruins had been cleared away. The streets have a desolate appearance, covered with red dust and with rubble piled up at the sides. Undamaged buildings are rare. Smoke rises from the chimneys of houses which are only half standing. The work of reconstruction goes on at a great rate, from early morning until dark. »

The team itself lives under fairly primitive conditions : « We are housed in an old Agricultural School building. There is only one habitable room, and here twenty-four people gather for meals during the day and overflow at night into the corridors and the tent out in the field. We are fortunate in having a carpenter among us, so that we have a little furniture and also, at last, a rainproof roof. We can't boast a door yet but we hope to have one ere winter. »

The work is demolition and the unskilled work involved in rebuilding, for families indicated as being amongst the most needy. The working day of eight hours is sometimes extended if work presses. There is great satisfaction in this work : « Tuesday of this week another house was completed enough to justify the traditional « Richtfest ». This house was begun only three weeks ago; naturally lots of work still has to be done finishing the inside etc. . . . , but it's pretty incredible so much could be accomplished in that time. I confess it gave me a thrill of pride to think that I had carried some of the bricks which ended up in the walls! »

The urgency of the work made it necessary to find a fairly large number of volunteers at very short notice, and that at a time when most of our experienced volunteers available for service had already been directed elsewhere. Besides this, it was not possible to find one experienced and suitable leader for the whole period; indeed, at one point there were three different leaders within two weeks ! Under such conditions it is not surprising if there were fluctuations in the spirit of the service. One volunteer writes : « The communal life is much more concentrated and closely knit than in some services The urgency of the work gives it a splendid sense of purpose. » Some weeks later the number of volunteers has risen rapidly from 14 to 31, and another volunteer writes : « The atmosphere is good but not sufficiently « civiliste ». This is due partly to the fact that we are scattered on five different jobs, partly to the large number of newcomers, who always take a little while to adjust themselves, and some of whom stay only a very short time — one or two weeks. But in spite of all this we try to create the right spirit and I think we are succeeding. »

And so the work goes on in this much tried town. And so, under difficult conditions, the group, despite all its changes and « ups and downs » strives to maintain the best tradition of S.C.I.

Experienced volunteers are still urgently needed for this service. Can you help ?

Note : This service will probably continue over winter. We need more volunteers, especially men !
Visas for Germany are now obtainable fairly easily and rapidly.

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P.M.