

**DONAUESCHINGEN WINTER SERVICE**  
**Nov. 1 1950 - Feb. 15 1951**

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It's not easy to give a congruous picture of the Donaueschingen winter service for two reasons. Firstly, in that the character of the group tended to be in a changing rather than in a static state, and secondly, because ones own personal feelings is so involved in every aspect of the service, that it's difficult to see it in an objective perspective.

The work itself, which has been perhaps the single constant feature, is easier to describe than the other aspects. Work, and to large extent outdoor work, has been able to continue without interruption through the winter. Held up to some extent by the November rain and mud, "Russia and nothing on this," was standing comment among the workers at the time, construction work on the 15 four-family housing units picked up again with increasing acceleration through the second half of December, January and on into February. One of the big problems was to dry out the walls of the houses so that the plasterers and painters could get under way. This problem was eventually licked by installing improvised sawdust ovens in the houses. These ovens burned night and day. Since November, four of these houses have been completed to the stage of being ready for occupation. They were no sooner ready, than occupied. Both refugee and local families have been among the lucky new occupants. It was a big day for us when 'Bonni', a refugee mason and roofer from Roumania, and one of the settlers and workers best known and best liked by the volunteers, moved into the "Neue Heimat" together with his wife and small child. Several of the volunteers had put in extra time for him as a contribution towards his 2000 hours, 2000 hours of work being required of each settler.

The work of the volunteers has been mostly of an unskilled variety, consisting of such things as mixing mortar and carrying stones for the masons, loading and unloading building materials, insulating between the floor and the ceiling directly below, and cleaning up the disorder and debris which is always a necessary though unspectacular part of such a construction job. Volunteers with considerable previous building experience have been assigned to skilled jobs which happen to be in their particular line, be it painting, carpentry or masonry. Five volunteers have been skilled building trade workers by profession.

An "amateur" undertaking such as the "Neue Heimat" is bound to make some mistakes and there have been discouraging moments as well as the thrilling moments. There were times during periods of curtailed work when there were too many volunteers to fill the immediate number of jobs; however the situation always found a solution before any drastic steps had to be undertaken. There was a time when several paid workers were released during which we seriously questioned ourselves and the "Neue Heimat" as to whether we were taking jobs away from others who needed them. Repeated assurances from the "Neue Heimat" that the same number of workers would have had to have been released whether or not we were there, and the fact that the unskilled labour which we had replaced enabled the "Neue Heimat" to hire that much additional skilled labour, quieted our consciences.

The winter service may be divided into roughly three periods, the turnover in personnel and the weather being the governing factors. The first period corresponded to November, the second running through December and the first half of January, and the third starting in the middle of January and continuing still.

The first period was marked in particular by the terrible weather, and the lack of experienced SCI volunteers. Volunteers came home almost every evening, tired, cold, and hungry, with clothes and shoes soaking wet, and with no further desire than to change into dry clothes, and to find a warm spot by the stove.

Aside from one stove in the community room, there was no heating in the barrack at the time. It was often impossible to dry the clothes properly, and we often went to work the next day in still wet clothes. With the exception of weekends and during occasional spells of good weather, energy and enthusiasm were definitely below par. There were also times when the only experienced volunteers, including the leader, were from AFSC and KVT. This was, without a doubt, the most difficult period.

December brought with it, a dry cold, considerable snow, a few experienced volunteers, and heating for the sleeping quarters. Things began looking up. The dry cold and snow was infinitely preferable to the November rain. The arrival of more experienced volunteers enabled the distribution of the camp leadership among more people. We could look forward to evenings in the barrack and dry clothes in the morning, and not to be forgotten, Christmas was coming. We are a small group, averaging between 10 and 12 in number throughout this period.

With the advent of the third period in the middle of January, the Donaueschingen service began to take on the aspects of a real SCI service. Our ranks were strengthened to 19 by the arrival of several volunteers who had just taken part in the Pierrefitte (?) training service, and others. For the first time since the early days of November it was possible to develop a more or less unified nucleus of experienced volunteers which gave the group a new sense of direction. Contacts with the local population which had remained in a fairly static state throughout November and December increased considerably. Participation in discussions took on a new interest and liveliness. Volunteers began showing up early for work. Weekend services together with young people from the town started. Volunteers for dishwashing appeared in abundance. A series of national open house evenings started off which Dutch evening, with Denmark following two weeks later. All these were signs of a fresh energy and enthusiasm developing within the group.

Throughout the whole winter period, the group has been a very colourful and interesting one. The character of the group has perhaps been more conspicuous in its individuals together with their strongly felt, freely expressed, and widely varied convictions and opinions, than by a spirit of co-operative togetherness. The group has always been very international with never less than five nations represented at any one time, and over the 3½ months span, no less than 12 nations have been represented. Organisation within the group itself has been loose, leaving for the most part each volunteer free to make or not to make his contribution, as he chose. It may at times have seemed as if this looseness carried democratic principles a little too far, as if a sense of direction was lacking. But this looseness also carried with it the advantage that each volunteer felt free to express himself as to matters concerning group policy, thus decisions reached, have been genuine group decisions, not decisions which have been forced upon the group. We have made our share of mistakes, but we have also learned through them.

We have come through this winter service thus far, with the feeling that it has taught us a great deal. We have learned lessons which SCI has undoubtedly learned before and will undoubtedly learn again, lessons which have sent each volunteer away from Donaueschingen with a clearer understanding of those ingredients necessary to a creative community life, and a deeper insight into human nature. We haven't felt that any of the problems with which we were faced, are incapable of solution, even though we may not always have found the correct solution.

Some of the more important lessons which we learned are these

- 1) That the adverse conditions confronting a long term winter service combine to make it impossible to judge the success of such a service by the same standards by which a shorter term summer service may be judged.
- 2) That during winter especially, a certain minimum of physical comfort for the volunteers must be reached before the "SCI spirit" can be expected of them.

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- 3) That it's very important to have a nucleus of experienced volunteers in the service, who are familiar with the aims, ideals and methods of the organisation.

- 4) That there are dangers which face a long term service, the greatest of these being that volunteers through falling into a day to day habit pattern lose the sense of urgency and importance connected with the service, which is so indispensable to the "SCI spirit"? Another lesser danger is that unless a special effort is made to keep the community interested, interest among the local population for the aims and activities of the service may fall, after the initial novelty has worn off.
- 5) That advance beyond a certain point in forming a creative group fellowship among the volunteers, is retarded by constant change in group personnel, which is to say that as the group changes, the same problems must be thrashed out repeatedly, making advance beyond a certain point extremely difficult.
- 6) Contrary to presupposed fears, the outdoor work under bad weather conditions, though causing considerable discomfort, didn't appear to damage the health of the volunteers. Cases of illness more serious in nature than routine colds, were not traceable to outdoor work in bad weather. However, extreme care must be taken to prevent physical injuries when the footing is slippery.

The service in Donaueschingen will continue until the fall, and it is sincerely hoped that information provided in this report will prove to be of some value to volunteers who are going to Donaueschingen during the next months.

Bill Sayre  
March 2, 1951