



LE SERVICE CIVIL

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

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The meeting of the International Committee at Zurich May 31st – June 2nd, 1952

Since the February meeting of the Committee the question of the personnel of the Int. Secretariat had been solved by appointing as co-secretaries, from May 1st, Ralph Hegnauer to work in Zurich, and Ethelwyn Best in Clichy — a solution which might have proved unrealistic because of the geographical separation involved, but which, as the work of the Committee progressed, was seen to be quite satisfactory in practice.

Among the interesting points which arose out of the review of the work in the different areas the following may be noted :

In Switzerland there was the question as to whether or not S.C.I. should be represented on the Youth Ship, voyaging down the Rhine this summer to encourage European Youth to unite. The decision was that printed material should be provided for distribution but that no active collaboration was advisable — and that if there was clearly the intention to use the ship for political ends, than S.C.I. should withdraw entirely.

In Great Britain I.V.S.P. had been investigating possibilities of a workcamp in Berlin with volunteers from the "East" — there were doubts as to whether real collaboration would be possible in Berlin, but in any case events have made such a camp impracticable at the moment.

The work of the French branch with the co-operative building groups known as "Castors" (French for Beavers — a very happy choice of name!) and the venture of large scale services were found to be especially encouraging, and it was noted in connection with the latter that volunteers, in order to realise their value, should be perpetrated for the difference of atmosphere between large and small services.

In both Norway and Great Britain wage-earning services were being organised for the profit of pioneer work — the funds raised would be used for Pakistan and Algeria respectively. The Swiss and Italian branches were co-operating at present and the bridge building service at Siderno promised to be very worth while.

A special concern was felt regarding the discipline of our services — the Committee fully realised the varied and conflicting reactions which this word arouses — and the following resolution was passed unanimously :

"A number of reports from services during the last few months lead us to think that the efficiency of the work and the unity and fine spirit of the services require a fresh emphasis on matters of discipline.

Branches and groups should seriously consider whether they may not be too ready to compromise so as to make a minimum demand upon volunteers who may be quite strange to S.C.I. traditions. Casualness and slackness in registering and arriving on service at the proper time, lack of discipline on the work and lack of order and cleanliness in the living quarters, undue freedom as to dress, show not only irresponsibility but also discourtesy to fellow volunteers and to those among and for whom the work is being undertaken. In the case of relations between men and women volunteers we ask our members to recognise in practice that freedoms which some may accept and approve in private life ought to be surrendered on joining an S.C.I. service.

There is an additional reason for us to be vigilant in these matters in that more than ever S.C.I. is coming into relations with other workcamp organisations. It is important that every S.C.I.-service should be true to the special and distinctive character of SCI."

Another important subject which occupied the committee was the effect on the impartiality, and the neutrality, of S.C.I. of accepting financial assistance such as that recently received from the Ford Foundation. The French branch felt strongly about this and had presented a special note on the subject to the committee. After very thorough discussion the following Resolution was passed unanimously :

"The International Committee has studied very carefully the problem submitted by the French branch as to the "neutrality" of S.C.I. and, in particular, the acceptance of the gift from the Ford Foundation. The International Committee is grateful to the French branch for having shaken it out of the complacency with which it had accepted this gift, and had already allocated part of it for special purposes, it being well understood that this fund could not in any way be used to subsidise the normal administration of the movement.

As things are, we do not wish to make further allocations without it having been possible for one of our members to discuss the matter thoroughly with Henry Roser, President of the French branch.

If it appears that we can, with a clear conscience, use the money which has been given — no obligation having been imposed upon us, and our having no intention of using it to benefit one side or the other — there will still remain the keen desire that this new tie, added to so many others which link us with the nations known today as the 'West', should be counterbalanced by further sincere and clear efforts to approach and understand those known as the 'East'."

Other items from a very full agenda included the encouraging developments in Algeria, the possibility of relaxing the "Home Service" rule in special cases, the urgency of finding experienced volunteers for new ventures, the future of the international bulletin "Le Service Civil", the composition and functions of the international committee and secretariat, Finance, preparations for the International Delegates' and Secretaries' Meetings in October — at which many of the subjects broached by the committee will be studied more thoroughly.

The atmosphere of the meetings was encouraging, the members of the committee welcomed the new opportunity for service which were becoming available to S.C.I. and saw in the problems with which they had been faced a testimony, as well as a challenge, to the strength and vitality of the movement.

Ethelwyn Best

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