

Leipzig, 2nd August 1956

We, 19 young people from Denmark, Holland, Bulgaria, Austria, Trinidad, the USA and the two parts of Germany, East and West, came here to spend two weeks working and living together in a voluntary work camp at Leipzig, where we have helped in the construction of a huge new stadium and a sport arena for the German youth. For us, this has been a wonderful experience in coexistence of youth of different languages, nationalities, races, and political and religious opinions. Now we prepare to return to our homes with many new impressions of the life in this country, where comparatively few visitors from Western countries have been in recent years.

In Leipzig we lived as young people and workers live here, worked the same hours as regular building workers and in close contact with them, we had our meals in their canteen and received the same wages. We had comfortable accommodation at a youth hostel for which we paid from our wages. At the end of the work period of two weeks we were invited to stay on for the Sport Festival taking place in the stadium we had helped to build.

We also had the opportunity of taking part in athletic tests - in running, swimming, jumping, shooting and gymnastics - and many of us won the Sport Medal of the GDR.

Our work was, of course, manual labour and at times we did have to put our shoulder to the wheel. But it must be admitted that our work was not well organised, so that at times we felt that our shovels were best used for leaning on, and that our work did not always deserve the kind attention we received on the part of the authorities and the Free German Youth.

The atmosphere was very cordial and there was much laughter, companionship, and a lot of singing, headed always by our Friend from Trinidad. The Danes were six men strong and formed more or less a group of their own, speaking their strange language. Most of us have seen a good deal of the night-life of Leipzig, which is a fairly gay city despite the ruins which can still be seen in many places and our work in the stadium sometimes suffered a little from the late hours.

After the work had been completed we left the hostel to stay under canvas in a camp-site for visitors to the Sport Festival, which found a remarkably well-organised affair. We have not seen nearly as much as we would have liked but do feel that we have a fairly good notion of how people actually live here. We would have liked, of course, to see much more of the German industrial establishments, collective farms, schools, student life, and the like, as we wish to learn as much as possible about the work and culture of the people.

In general, we feel that our coming together has been quite successful, though as a new trail-breaking attempt it had certain organisational shortcomings. We have certainly all learned a good deal. We feel that for international rapprochement and the development of tolerance and mutual understanding among the people of different nations and especially between the peoples on both sides of the notorious "curtain" many more such camps should be organised in the future. This is one of the ways - and one of the best - in which the peoples can learn to see each other as they really are.