

REPORT ON CAMP AT CISNA (I) POLAND (JULY 1958)

Outset, Date, Place :

Each volunteer from SCI received an information sheet with details of a proposed cheap group travel arrangement from Paris via Liège to Warsaw. As the volunteers coming from France had considerable delay in obtaining visas, insufficient volunteers assembled at Liège to substantiate a group ticket, so the two Belgian volunteers, Jremy Criddle and I had to buy individual tickets, thus increasing the cost for each volunteer.

On Sunday July 6th we were met at Warsaw Station and arrived at the Polish Rural Youth Office to find that several SCI volunteers had already arrived (from Germany, Denmark and Sweden). We slept in the afternoon and caught an evening train such to Rzeszow, and next morning continued to Cisna, travelling together with volunteers from Poland, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia.

Cisna is a small village in Southeast Poland, less than 20 miles from the Russian and Czech borders. The camp site itself was at Krywe, about 3 miles south of Cisna. We were accommodated in new chalets. We stayed at Krywe from July 7 to 26.

Description of Area :

This area of Poland, unlike the rest of the country, is very hilly, bordering on the Carpathian mountains. Swiftly flowing rivers line the spruce-wooded valleys. In 1948 the area was evacuated by the Poles during fighting with the Ukrainian nationalists. Houses and crops were burned before they left. Thus the region is now inhabited by newcomers, who are pioneering to make new communities and a living from local resources. Consequently the SCI idea of "integrating with the local population" is faced with considerable problems.

Integration with local folk :

The population is not in the real sense 'local', and most of our 'Integrating' was with other newcomers visiting the district, e. g. scout and guide groups, socialist youth movement, Polish young artists.

Roads in the area were partly destroyed or made unusable, so to ride around the area was 'shaking' experience !

Work :

Our project was to work on road construction, on the road south from Krywe towards other lonely homesteads and Russia and Czechoslovakia. We spent the first days digging a trench and grading the slope alongside the road. Later we were switched to work at a nearby quarry, clearing soil from rock which was to be used for covering the roads. We also dug a trench alongside the road to the quarry.

The problem crossed our minds as to whether this was not in fact work which would otherwise have been done by paid labour. On this issue I think SCI can have a clear conscience, because at no time was there any hint of competition with local workers, and there is so much work to be done in the area that our contribution was small.

We started work at 6.30 a. m. and worked until 2.00 p. m. with half an hour break at about 10.30 a. m. On Saturdays we stopped work at 12.00 noon, after negotiating with the Polish leader who originally intended that we should work a 48 hours week, and had previously signed a 'contract' to say that we should work 48 hours per week.

Organisation :

The SCI volunteers all understood on applying to go to Poland that the camp was to be jointly organised by SCI and the Union of Polish Rural Youth. The two volunteers from Yugoslavia arrived knowing nothing of SCI, and complaining that they had understood that the camp was to be primarily for international discussion rather than for work.

Visa-delay caused late arrival of SCI leader :

The Belgian branch organised SCI's participation at the camp. They sent two Belgians, but Roland Massuard, a Frenchman was appointed leader and he did not arrive until July 10th owing to delay in obtaining a visa. Thus SCI had no official leader for the first four days, and the Polish leader took all initiative. In many ways this was inevitable. He spoke French and Polish and Russian, he knew the sponsoring people and local contacts, he was responsible for the eleven Polish volunteers.

However, SCI had very little say in the running of day to day affairs. A House Meeting, not called until Monday, July 14th, the first and last meeting as such, was the only official meeting at which joint control was openly and jointly discussed.

"Joint" Control :

Harboured and differing views were expressed, such as the SCI insistence on a 48 hour week, and a paper pinned up for all to see with free time events published well in advance. This latter point arose after some discontent on being informed at the last minute that "we are now going to such and such". This is not to say that we did not wish to participate in a particular spare time activity, but it was extremely difficult to plan one's free time in advance.

Throughout the camp, the Polish leader, independent of SCI and other volunteers' consultation, took initiative and announced activity at the last minute and without discussion.

SCI must consider very carefully in future the whole question of joint organised camps. "We cannot serve masters" became all too evident at this camp. Can SCI be right in risking a sacrifice of some democratic control, in order to reach people in countries where, without joint control, SCI influenced Camps would be impossible ?

Future joint control :

This camp was working on part of a government plan to develop a backward area. Is this what SCI is for ? Could SCI co-operate, for instance, with a Spanish fascist dominated rural youth movement, during similar work ?

Discussions & language problems :

Discussions were held formally on SCI and on Polish Rural Youth, but more was gained via constant informal discussions on all subjects. Obstacles incurred were language and age difficulties, but these were generally overcome. Below is a list on nationalities represented :

2 Belgium	5 France	2 Sweden
2 Czechoslovakia	2 Germany (West)	1 USA
1 Denmark	1 Holland	2 Yugoslavia
2 England	11 Poland	

Polish and French were the official camp languages, but English and Russian were also used a great deal

Campfires :

Campfires and a visit to Lesko, a nearby town, on the Polish National Holiday, were possibly the most enjoyable and peacemaking occasions.

Local visits :

We were grateful to the Poles for organising visits to the Russian and Czech borders by lorry, and also for the numerous parties for our benefit. Throughout the camp all cooking was done by a canteen and Polish cooks, so the camp sisters worked as with the male volunteers almost all the time.

Food :

It would be wrong to criticise the meals in a country which has known starvation. With more initiative more and more varied foods could be produced, but our meals lacked nothing in quantity.

Post camp activity :

Also at the end of the camp we were taken to Krakow for two days, where we visited old churches, a fairly new factory and housing estate. We spent nearly four hours going around Auschwitz Concentration Camp, which was a gruelling experience, especially for the German volunteers. It made us realise how necessary work camps are, to heal the mental and physical scars of war. Some seem to heal very slowly, if at all.

Informal co-lingual groups :

From Krakow we returned to Warsaw for two days, During these two visits to Krakow and Warsaw we were free to go wherever we wished , so informal groups sprang up, which was a measure of the degree of co-operation actually achieved, co-lingual volunteers tended to stay together.

Pocket money :

Pocket money (200 Zlotys per volunteer) were issued by the Poles, all rail fares from Warsaw and back to Warsaw, were paid by the Poles, and we were given quite an expensive present at Kywe. This, of course, is not normal SCI practice, but as the pocket money is being refunded to SCI to aid Polish volunteers in West Europe, I approve of these actions.

Work clothes and boots were provided.

To conclude, most volunteers did not feel a great deal of satisfaction with the work project, especially as there was often no explanation as to a plan beforehand, but we felt that quite a lot had been achieved concerning international understanding.

Hope, that SCI will be able to arrange, and if necessary finance participation in West European camps by Polish volunteers. All interchange of views is good, so I hope that West Europeans will also continue to go to camps in Poland, but on the basis of genuine joint control by SCI, or better still, to camps in Poland run only by SCI.

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