

*Abschrift des Sekretariats :*

Judith Evans

Berlin, November 61

We have been here two weeks now and beginning to be able to see things more clearly now we have adapted ourselves to such a completely different way of life. Our team is ten, all told from every continent. We are Indian, American, African, Australian, Swedish, Swiss and English. Most have just finished their studies, some have come from other SCI projects and plan to be here up to two months; hoping in some way through our life and work here to help lessen the tension and find out the essential truths on the Berlin-situation.

Trough Roswitha, the Secretary of the German SCI, we have been put in contact with a number of people who are actively working for peace, among them Quakers. The name Aktion Sühnezeichen ( Action Reconciliation, literally Expiation ) comes into conversation very often. This is a comparatively new German Christian group which has sent teams to carry out constructive work in many parts of the world. There are a group at the moment in Coventry building completely the international centre there behind the altar of the old cathedral. I heard much more about them when I visited the wife of the leader of the group, whose home is here in Berlin.

Our last day off we were invited to a young Christian group in a parish of a suburb of East Berlin. This was the first opportunity to find out what life is really like there especially from the point of view of mental and spiritual freedom. It made me realize much more, the courage one needs there to hold to one's principles in the face of real pressure from the government and actual less of work and student place. The young people we met are longing to see people "from outside".

I don't know what possibilities there will be for an SCI project there but at least they can't refuse us for religious or political reasons and yet we would still be free as individuals to do what we must for love and mutual understanding. Of course we have a longer way to go to achieve this within our team. Usually we work and live together. Here we live in two different houses, share only one meal together in the community dining room and work, each in different houses. We do some things together in our midday break and are together most evenings in our own common room either informally or for special discussions which we've decided should be focussed on the Berlin situation. But everybody is realizing that it needs much from each one of us to make a team.

We are gradually making good friends with the people with whom we work and among the social welfare students and Vicarinnen-students with whom we share this house. On the wall of our common room there is a delightful invitation to a party. It's typical of the hospitality we are continually meeting.

Johannisstift, the place of this project is over 20 km from the centre of Berlin. It is a self contained Christian institution which cares for each sick, old people, physically handicapped children and young people, emotionally handicapped boys, and it is our work here to help care for them. There is also a school and Vikarinnen-school. Many people from all over the world as well as Germany come here. It was once a well known meeting place between East and West German "before the wall". It comprises a number of large picturesque houses grouped round the church in a wonderful forest setting.

About a mile away in the forest is the border of the Russian zone. The barbed wire fence there is a double one with rolls of wire in between, and always there is a loudspeaker blaring out happy singing voices and talk of some kind. We talked the West German policeman there, about peace, we would have liked to have been able to talk to the two East German ones on the other side of the fence but they were too far away. They were not unfriendly. Nor were the ones at the Brandenburger Tor, Potsdamer Platz and Friedrichstrasse, the last the only place where those who are allowed can pass through "the wall".

"Die Mauer" in a way seems too utterly ridiculous to be true, but only a little more so than dividing a city in the first place. On each side the people are longing to see each other, to know really how the other is but all the time they are pressed on each side by political propaganda, both in East and West, about the goodness of life on this side and the bad life on the other. Thank God there is truth in the hearts of all men, however, misguiding or misguided they may be. After a morning of strolling round East Berlin, we went into a milk bar which somehow reminded me of one of the Woolworth restaurants. It was full of people enjoying good wholesome food and each others company. There was a sign hanging gaily in the entrance to a wine corner. On it was written : in Wine is Truth. It made me wonder what secret fears and hopes that wine would reveal. Perhaps the sort of thought that are constantly in the minds of people for which this wall means separation from loved ones or the kind which are in the minds of those young Christians we visited later in the evening, for whom the wall is not only bricks and mortar but an increased manifestation of the mental barrier they have come against all through their schooling, a wall they are beginning to fear is impossible to overcome.

But the people of West Berlin also have their walls, mental barriers to truth which are not so obvious but just as difficult to overcome perhaps.

The psalm for the evening for the day we arrived in Berlin contained this verse : "With the help of my God I shall leap over the wall". I believe more than ever that it is only with his absolute truth and love that the walls will be overcome.