

Internationaler Zivildienst, Hamburg 1, Beim Strohhaus 14

Berlin, den 16. Dezember 1961

S. C. I. project Berlin Dezember 1961

One word which seems to be written in large letters to describe the past few weeks is " Contacts ". Each visit to someone in Berlin brings more invitations and more names of people it is felt we should meet.

At one meeting with a Quaker lady in West-Berlin listening to her description of the work that is being done in this city for reconciliation : the study and searching for the causes of this present situation, the protest to the West German government, the continual attempts to talk with East Berlin communists and to understand their point of view, the setbacks, the apparently impenetrable stone wall that makes people feel that even though they have been discussing in the same language, the words mean something quite different between one and the other.

Can we meet all these people ? Already we can see how little we really know and understand each other within our group and how hazy are our individual conception of our task here besides our immediate work in Johannisstift.

What is our work here ? I believe it is primarily to come to know, understand and be at one within our group, to care for the people, old, young, sick and disabled and by our presence bring them a breath of air and colour from the wide world outside (yesterday we celebrated the Swedish feast of Santa Lucia, Elisabeth brought much more than the light on her crown of candles to some of our people. One old lady asked if an angel had visited them). We have to come to know and understand our patients, the people with whom we work and everyone else we come in contact with in everyday-life here. This I can see as our essential work, it has to come first and be given the best of our time, all our other work for peace as a group or as individuals is useless without this first being done with our whole will.

Above all is the need for self-discipline. SCI aims are to do constructive work together where it is needed, for mutual understanding and co-operation between people of different nations. How much is laid on each individual volunteer to acknowledge the scope of choice of thought, word and action which these aims allow and also how great is the need for each working member of SCI to make himself personally responsible to pursue those aims to the limit and beyond if he has faith in a power greater than himself. Without this spirit any camp is weak and especially in such a project as this where our practical working together and in many ways our living together is in apparent separation.

To know and understand — to trust. A short while ago we heard from the young assistant priest here, that three members of a young Christian group had been imprisoned with sentences up to four years, found guilty of sedition against the state. They had not done anything extraordinary but among them had been for two years a young man who had first come to them in need of help. They had given him all, work, home, friends and their thoughts and the young man had passed these on to someone in authority in the East German administration. When one bears things like this one is in danger of turning to even those closest and thinking " Is it you ? ", fear, distrust and secrecy begin to creep in, but they must not be allowed. These are the foundation stones of dividing walls.

It was good to meet a day after hearing this news, a Quaker lady in East Berlin. She lives a full and happy family life there. While she is aware of the faults of the government she is also able to speak of good things; among them, the free education which includes a good time spent in handicraft and other creative subjects. One of her sons, aged 12, is able to receive instruction in astrology by a renowned professor in that sphere. Some of the teachers are Christian and there are even Christians in government posts, they offered their services with a will to be constructive, one of these is a right hand man of Ulbricht.

This Quaker lady has made personal protests about certain things that have crossed her path in her duty as a parent. As she put it and I've heard this saying a few times before here, her protest was made "only between for eyes" — personal contact. Her opinion has been respected and accepted. I would guess she is known as a person of integrity, love and constructive thought and action.

If we would make peace, we have to go on speaking the truth in love, not asking or expecting too much but hoping and praying to be a means of bringing forth the best.

Judith Evans