

56 Marlborough Avenue,
Hull, Yorkshire.
22 January, 1962

Dear Roswitha,

Many thanks for sending me the notes about the proposed new service in Berlin.

May I first of all say that I feel, like you, that we need more concrete proposals as to the scheme of study to be followed and the people to be responsible for directing it. At present it seems to me to be far too vague, except for the proposal to learn German.

On the general principle of Work-&-Study camps I have an open mind, although SCI has traditionally always put practical help first. I do think, however, that a long-term camp on this sort could easily degenerate so far as the value of the study is concerned unless the programme was clearly defined in the first place and was under the direction of a specialist in the subjects concerned. In fact SCI has a little experience of the study-camp that I should have thought it better to confine our experiments for some time to come short-term services.

I am not convinced that it is really necessary on a long-term service to have a shortened working day in order to become reasonably familiar with the social and political problems which surround one. I can speak here from some experience, as I spent most of 1947 in Berlin as a member of a SCI relief team. Then, at any rate, it was very easy to get access to youth clubs and other organisations and to get speakers to visit the group to talk on specific problems. Admittedly the situation has changed considerably, but basically I think it should be possible for a group of young people who are anxious to make contacts to learn a great deal about current problems if they can find the right sort of work, work which takes them out and about amongst a variety of people. For this purpose the Johannisstift job, useful as it was as a piece of social service, was not suitable, since, if I am right, it was limited to work within one institution. Would it, do you think, be possible to obtain work with public welfare authorities on a basis of a minimum payment to cover board, lodging and a small pocket-money allowance?

I have only one reservation to make with regard to work for religious organisations. If their work was either limited to members of their own confession or was openly aimed at making converts, then I do not think SCI should work with them. On the basis of 'help for all who need it', whatever their beliefs', I can see no serious objection.

I find the learning of German a little out of place as an aim for a study camp, at any rate where raw beginners are concerned. Anyone seriously interested in a project of this kind should have made a good deal of the necessary effort at home and should have reached the stage when he can read non-technical German and write the kind of thing one might expect from a hard working school-boy of 14 or 15. He would then stand some chance of getting to understand a speech in German before the end of his term of service; but for practical reasons, I personally feel that volunteers for a study camp should only be accepted if they have, for a short-term camp, a good command of the spoken language and for a long-term camp, at least a fair knowledge of at least the printed and written language. On a 'purely' working workcamp this is much less important, since deeds speak louder than words.

Whether or not to go on with the new suggestion must, I think, depend upon the seriousness and the clarity of the plan of study put forward and whether suitably qualified people can be found, before applications for service are invited, to take responsibility for the direction and practical teaching work of that programme, and that I am sure will not be easy. It certainly requires quite a number of specialists who are each willing to give quite an amount of spare time to lecturing and, I think, to marking written work, — if the course is to be anything more than a dilettante excuse for the real thing.

Hans-Ulrich Smoltczyk's protest about the invitation to FDJ officials to attend an SCI camp.

I find it very difficult to reply to this. In the first place, SCI has always stood for the belief that there is good in all men and it has frequently met with surprisingly favourable relations when it has approached unlikely people in that spirit. If SCI did not invite NAZI officials to attend work camps, at least it invited Swiss army officials, who were strongly opposed to the opinion of many SCI friends and had imprisoned not a few, to visit camps and speak to the volunteers in Pierre Ceresole's day. And it will be remembered that Pierre made the best effort he could to visit Hitler, and, I believe, was strongly criticised for doing so. If we really believe that the spirit of SCI, when it finds its proper expression, can and sometime does have a profound effect even on those who are not sympathetic to it or who try to use it for their own ends, then we must believe that it is right and proper to invite our 'enemies' to share this experience with us. Surely this is what SCI is about. Obviously it is important in cases of this sort that numbers be limited, so that the camp should not be unbalanced. With that proviso I should personally be delighted to see a number of 'antiarabischen Algerienfranzosen' on our camps. Hans-Ulrich thinks, and I can well understand this, that to hope for success in the present political crisis is either 'ein abenteuerliches Wunschdenken oder politische Taktik irgendeines'. Many people, you know, take at least the first view of all SCI aims at any time; and is it not just in times of tension that SCI should be most active provided that conditions of physical upheaval do not actually make its work impossible ?

Though I can or at least try to understand something of the terrible situation arising from the division of Germany and consequently something of why Hans-Ulrich feels so strongly about this matter, I am a little sorry that he seems to look upon SCI as a sort of minor political organisation which must always take one side or another rather than as a potentially powerful force for reconciliation and re-education.

I hope you will be good enough to pass this on to him with my warm greetings and my apologies for not writing in German, denn man kann immer viel mehr verstehen als man sprechen oder schreiben kann und wenn man etwas ausdrücken möchte, was am Herzen liegt (stimmt das ?) so ist es besser, die Muttersprache zu benutzen.

Ich bitte auch vielmals um Verzeihung, daß ich so schlecht mit der Maschine schreibe !

Herzliche Grüße von
Eurem

Douglas (*Sowerby*)

Handschriftlicher Zusatz an Ralph Hegnauer :

Dear Ralph,

I am sorry H.U.S. writes so bitterly, understandable though it is. Am very doubtful about this Berlin scheme.

All good wishes to Idy

Douglas