

Internationaler Zivildienst  
Hamburg 1, Beim Strohhaus 14

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Ken Putnam, Berlin-Spandau :

In the action-packed month of trying to make a smooth transition between this workcamp and a new Berlin project one of the things we learned was that one must always allow a breathing space for the bureaucracy. The Johannisstift camp ended on 10. 2.62 without any final decision on what more SCI should do in Berlin. Let us hope that the breathing space thus acquired is not being used for sleep. A clear break between projects give the second various advantages of a fresh start but indefinite delay will mean the loss of such groundwork as we have been able to lay on the scene.

To begin the recapitulation of the whole idea of a new Berlin project as it now stands we must revert to that still unanswered question which is certainly basic : How important to SCI is the Cold War in Berlin ? To those of us who have worked here, Berlin seems as much of an emergency disaster area as the Algerian refugee camps and at least as central to world social welfare. However, the essence of the problem is POLITICAL of which even the Berliners are largely ignorant. As far as we can tell the wealth of the two societies involved is such, and the fear of physical war so great, that Berlin today has none of the immediate physical needs so familiar to SCI in its work in other parts of the world. Marginal needs, of types familiar in all our wealthy countries, are here to be sure — it is to one of these that we have made three months' welcome contribution in Johannisstift. However Ulla Tennenbaum's 1st point is well taken in her letter of 1. 2. 62 when she says that work-campers preoccupied with full time work on one side of the city will participate in the already ingrown ignorance and hatred against "the others" who are blamed for all evil. While this is a worldwide phenomenon, interest and misinformation are intensified in the microcosm of Berlin by such aspects as the family tragedies involved. However, if any simple statement can be made with impartial confidence it is that the Berlin fire has been generously fed from at least two sides ever since the war. SCI cannot afford to send volunteers here unless their first aim be to overcome their petty loyalties which stifle most men's thoughts. Whatever may have been true during SCI-work in 1947 that is an involved task today.

We were distantly aware of these difficulties from the beginning and came to Johannisstift with an aim much broader than the confines of our physical work. At least we are not aware of having been used for propaganda for we have had no publicity ! However, any positive achievements have been limited by time and ignorance. For instance it is not at all clear what place should be taken by such apparently humanitarian tasks as visiting East Berliners and taking them the allowed quantity of fruits or such not available to them in their own shops. If they are faced with adapting themselves to isolation from the rest of the world, it may be no kindness to accustom them to international delegations bearing rare gifts. It certainly contributes to the superiority — inferiority feeling of the "have" West and "have not" East. Thus sending packets at least is officially encouraged in the West and by the same token the East authorities may find it distasteful. To some extent it is just such immediate, unreflected responses to the situation which hinder people from seeking profounder solutions. Each side is so bathed in one-sided propaganda that it must take real will or real strength of character to rise above the fatalistic hopelessness of the official position which put all the onus of solution on the "others".

In this situation we have proposed a sort of responsibility citizen research of a type which should be possible for all and necessary to the functioning of democracy but which has been almost wholly missing, at least officially. While this would not be political, in the sense that there is no likelihood of endorsing any existing government, it might very quickly turn out to be anti-political and thus distasteful to everyone in authority. Thus we are presented with a problem which is essentially different from aiding people towards goals and solutions towards which they were already basically sympathetic or leading towards. Nobody of responsibility in Berlin wants a wholly cooperative solution! Thus there are no objective sources of information readily available. The whole history of the DDR and the BRD, of communism and capitalism in Germany and of the allied decisions in Germany is relevant and must be studied but every source seems to colour and limit its information to suit their own poses. The investigator is left to piece together real motive and even the real course of events for himself. But is it only as citizens take the responsibility of discovering what lies behind the official version of Current history that there becomes an opportunity for the general population to participate in deciding its own fate.

What has this to do with SCI ? It seems to us that this not only is the only opportunity to contribute to peace, understanding and international cooperation here in Berlin, but that here is an unparalleled opportunity to tackle the ignorance which is the top root of war in a similar manner to our accustomed methods of tackling the poverty and backwardness physically which are subsidiary roots of war. That is SCI with an international team in Berlin can bring its faith in cooperation and peaceful reconciliation and its obvious concern to bear, as setting an example of involvement and search for causes, a solution by the ordinary citizen. It is my earnest conviction that we will experience another world war in my lifetime if some general awakening to the course and causes of events does not take place. Does this problem involve SCI ?

The proposal to which we have come in Berlin is a work / study camp. To accept further marginal work here on part-time basis is constant with the marginal work ( as contrasted with pioneer work ) that we do elsewhere in wealthy countries. Leaving a full half day for study of the situation allows campers to get involved in a number of weeks which is a very short time indeed compared to the residence of the local people. This is a gravely different situation to that in which the problem — in which we are interested — is and the problem we're meeting through our work itself ! There are soldiers and police of six nations to see that we don't get near the only overt physical manifestation of the Berlin problem.

Why work at all ? Quite frankly only to support the study. However, when we must work we must apply our SCI principles as much as possible and not accept unimportant work in heavily subsidized West Berlin Industry, for example. The Innere Mission has proved a thoughtful employer here in Johannisstift and have kindly offered us new work in a better location on our own terms of halfaday — but only if we guarantee three months service to make it worth their while. While there are arguments for other lengths of camp, it seems to be that it would be reasonable to allow the Innere Mission desire to fix this experiment at three months. The work itself is helping in homes of people just released from hospital or otherwise in need of a helper for a few hours each week. While this is essentially "women's work", IM has agreed to take on both sexes and send them out in pairs at least at first. They and we both hope that when the time came some more active work would be found for the men. It is questionable what other acceptable employers could be found who would take people half a day, particularly if we accept non-German speaking volunteers. However, it should be pointed out that IM suggests what would be more than half-a-day — averaging over five hours and with the added confusion for group activities of unpredictable time of finishing for lunch. For this the IM would have to dip into a special fund in addition to regular pay to meet its own charges for room and board at Altensteinstrasse of DM 6,50 a day. This would provide very good living arrangements, including a common room and meals laid on, but no leeway for other group expenses. Transport, books, newspapers and other study materials it would be unrealistic to expect group members to be able to pay themselves. Singling out one group member to be wage earning for the group adds the stigma of being singled out for the dirty work to all the previous disadvantages of the group working higher paid jobs ( save that the one might be a German ).

The question of how much German to require of applicants depends partly on our view of whether we set up a project in Berlin ( as in most places ) to allow ordinary people ( SCI-members ) to make a contribution to local improvement or whether we limit our participants to those with technical skills to meet the need ( as with long-term work ). It is not true that volunteers coming to Great Britain all have some command of English. It is however true that it is a vastly different matter for those with three years of required school English to try to speak it than for the majority of foreigners who have never had an hour's instruction in German to try to learn to speak German. In Johannisstift we have been hindered by the necessity to use English as our group language, by the lack of time for lessons and by the difficulty many of our patients have in saying any words at all. Obviously for a successful camp more German will have to be either required ( and whom will we get ? ) or taught ( and any professional training, including CDG, costs money ) ?

Official contacts need further perusal although we have much printed material. We already have many youth group contacts. While it is difficult to be selective or representative, we must reemphasize that no real solution seem available from the general public and our first aim is to learn and not to teach.

If we abandon Berlin without further experiment we are running from our problems.

Kendrick Putnam