

S E R V I C E C I V I L I N T E R N A T I O N A L

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IMPORTANT NOTES FOR VOLUNTEERS SERVING ON WORKCAMPS IN EASTERN EUROPE

The Form of the workcamp

In the Socialist Republics workcamps have a slightly different character to that which we are used to finding in the S.C.I. camps. Do not be disappointed by first impressions after having travelled thousands of kilometres, but try to understand the value of workcamps in the Eastern countries.

The camp is, above all, the practical and economic way to meet volunteers from all countries, and at the same time it is a demonstration of the effectiveness of such exchanges for Peace. It is there that the value of the workcamps lies and to which we have much to add. The work itself should also be worthwhile and useful.

Choice of Volunteers

Under the minimum condition of experience and maturity, the volunteers should have taken part in several kinds of workcamp. They must be serious workers : the West is judged to them. The talker who reserves himself for discussions but is of no use as regards work, must be obviously chased away from all workcamps but especially so in the East.

Languages

All young people in the East have learned Russian, so it would be better to have some idea of this language. But in any case they will not be proficient enough for serious discussions, so knowledge of Russian is not essential. But all volunteers should be able to speak at least two European languages.

Professions

As for all workcamps the ideal is to have as large a number of professions as possible represented, especially volunteers well informed of the realities of peasants and workers.

Political and Social Preparation

This is an important point, linked, moreover, to the preceding remark. Too much naiveté and inexperience could be dangerous. Thought must have been given to the political and social struggle and its general problems. Without this there is a risk of not carrying weight before those, often picked, sound and experienced, who are fighting for ideas in the East. Moreover, if we realise more than they the flaws in their system, the same applies to them as regards our system. A gallant little boy scout with an unenlightened upbringing will misrepresent what he sees, will miss the essential points, and will soon be dumbfounded.

It is good to have a thorough knowledge of one's own country, especially when confronted with people who are remarkably well informed. Information leaflets are available from your own tourist boards to take with you !

Reasons for going on a Workcamp

They must be serious, containing at least the will to make oneself understood. They must be above simple curiosity - (a workcamp is such an easy and cheap way to visit these "forbidden" lands !)

Preparation

a) Individual

Very important. The preparation must be long and serious, although far be it from me to encourage a "know-all" or bookworm volunteer. But why hide the shame felt before historical, social and geographical ignorance which leads to blunders and offence? The Eastern peoples are often nationalistic, and it is easy to turn this spirit to our advantages by surprising them with a knowledge of their history, writers and artists which will certainly hit the mark.

The camp is short : if one is already aware of the problem (in theory) in the country it is obviously easier to locate them, to see how they actually occur and to pose essential questions and be ready to discuss the replies.

b) In a group

Group work is easier if everyone knows each other, more so as diversity is greater among Western than Eastern volunteers. From the very start of a camp one notices the difference between those who came in a group, for example from Paris (in 30 hours of train journey one has time to develop a team spirit) and those who arrive alone (and by virtue of this fact, late).

General Behaviour

- avoid as much as possible shocking the Eastern people by opposing nationalist manifestos; going to work with a flag or in national groups; team competitions or distinctions of any sort.
- do not give way to national attractions or temptations in your own group; do not allow divisions to occur, whatever the excuse may be in English or French, etc. Remain the S.C.I. team without, in so doing, preventing yourself from emphasizing how much we remain respectful of everyone's ideas and the differences between individuals.
- hold S.C.I. house meetings as often as possible.
- try to introduce as much democracy as possible into the general running of the camp : the house meetings should be as democratic as possible; the rules and plans and essential decisions should be made in common; and not imposed by the Eastern leaders without discussion. These things will not be easy to achieve; much depends on the leader from the East.
- finally, if international contacts appear to become more important than the work it is up to us, while accepting certain compromises, to make all aspects of our work understood.

Discipline

Never forget that we are being watched. Consequently, avoid anything which might resemble provocation or which might shock the other volunteers or the population. The self-discipline which is our rule everywhere is especially important on an East-West camp. Never do anything which will result in critical observations on your conduct, your application to work, or respect for the international timetable and rules.

The Role of the S.C.I. Leader

He exercises simultaneously firmness and diplomacy. He must :

- represent the S.C.I. in general, personify its spirit and make its character respected.
- be the spokesman for his team and defend its rights.
- take care to avoid accepting privileges granted to the leaders from the East, and show them that the S.C.I. leader lives and works as an ordinary volunteer and that his special duties come as an addition to normal work.

Appraisal of Political Position

There is no question of our having to give ourselves up to some party or trend. Our only guides are tolerance, love of liberty, and love of man (our fellow man, whatever he does). "Tolerance" not passive or condescending but an active tolerance built on comprehension.

We come from the West, but we must not Lazily wash our hands of what our governments do, nor must we necessarily identify our position with theirs.

Beware of big theoretical debates where the options tend to harden before sterile opposition; keep to reality and to the concrete fact. Multiply individual discussions or small groups where it is much easier to hear one another without undergoing the repetition of difficult, stereotyped theses.

Additional points

1. Do not take any Eastern European currency into Eastern Europe - change Western currency when already in Eastern Europe. Make an exact declaration of Western currency in your possession when you enter Eastern Europe and keep the form given to you when you make the declaration. Also, keep the forms received on exchange of currency for presentation to the customs authority on departure.
2. Do not agree to take any written messages across borders.
3. Do not become involved in discussions of problems of "getting out" to the West.
4. Concentrate on obtaining information on positive aspects of the Eastern European way of life, as the people there see them, rather than the negative aspects with which you are probably quite familiar. Remember that we are all conditioned by the society in which we live - go to learn and not to teach.
5. Do not accept money or any gift of value, unless a refusal would come serious embarrassment. Explain that you are work camping because you want to build international understanding through economic work. If you are obliged to accept pocket-money - and this is given to all volunteers on some camps - you should send an equivalent amount to your national branch secretariat after your return. This is your responsibility : the money will be used to promote further East-West exchange.
6. Take photographs of your family and home-town with you, and postcards to show to other volunteers. If you take a camera with you, check before taking photographs, especially outside the camp, to make sure there are no restrictions on photography in the area.

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