

SERVICE CIVIL INTERNATIONAL

REPORT on a visit to friends in PRAGUE, experienced and / or interested in the work of S.C.I.
on March 30th to April 2nd 1967.

On behalf of the Executive Committee of SCI I contacted on 2. 2. 1967 our friend Eugen Schart for a visit to Prague during my spring holidays. I got a very kind invitation and soon after the friends in Prague fixed an extremely good and interesting programme for my visit. The "informal group" even arranged its first week-end service in the period of my stay. Thanks to Mr. Skacel of CSM I received an invitation letter, so that the visum for the CSSR was free of cost and I had no currency troubles at the frontier. After consultation with the friends in Prague I tried to thank Mr. Skacel personally for his gesture, but he was out of town and therefore I wrote a letter for thanks to him.

The time after my arrival (a delegation of three at Praha hl. n.) I spent the time with Eugen Schart discussing the situation and my program. After having heard Jo Motycka only at the ICM things gradually became clearer to me. The next day was spent for a visit of beautiful Prague. In the morning I got to know our Friend Wazlaw Brichacek, who together with Milada Havlikova was so kind as to show me the Prague Citadel. In the afternoon I met with our friend Zdaneck Teichman. He invited me for dinner with his family.

During these preliminary talks I was confronted with the internal difficulties of the "informal group" of SCI friends. It became clear to me that the difficult situation in this country had added to the existing divergences. A lack of consultation between the friends Jo Motycka - - Eugen Schart / Zdaneck Teichman had even caused bad feelings. There exists certainly also the difficulty caused by the fact that with three generations of friends it is not easy to find the unity, which is of such importance here. We find the older generation, experienced volunteers from as far back as 1946 and earlier : Frantisek Prikryl, Jiri Ruzicka; then the middle generation as Wazlaw Brichacek, a well-known psychologist lecturing at the Prague university and last but certainly not least the younger generation of which far away the greater part took part in SCI-camps outside the CSSR in recent years.

At Helena Klimova's house the same evening some twelve members of the "informal group" assembled for an open meeting to which I was invited. I answered a series of basic questions on SCI so as conscientious objection, nuclear disarmament, SCI and Vietnam, wage earning services . . . At the end the existence of the "informal group" was thoroughly discussed (!). Three things became evident :

- 1) The people present felt that it was not desirable in the long run for the friends of SCI to work under the umbrella of CSM. It was mentioned that the umbrella of the Red Cross or some UNESCO-committee would do better and investigations to this end were to take place.
- 2) The "informal group" is content with its cooperation with the authorities and continues to seek their advice. It was mentioned to contact in this matter an older SCI volunteer, who at the moment is in a high position in the CSSR.
- 3) Unity within the group should be promoted by provisionally call for a small steering-committee.

It was generally regretted that Jo Motycka, who was in Prague, did not turn up for this meeting.

The next day I took part in the first week-end camp at Olesovice, 15 miles from Prague, a place where in former years already an SCI service took place. It should be mentioned that thanks to the good preparations of Zdaneck Teichman and also Eugen Schart this service was a full success. About 27 volunteers aging from 63 to 5 of which one third women came to the garden around a children's home, which needed clearing up. Favoured by sunshine and a happy spirit everybody experienced the unity, which is a result of hard work, a good chat and much fun. I only regretted not to understand the Czech language. If our friends will be able to have more of such services in future it will be of immense value for the creation of an SCI-group. For me this service was a wonderful experience and I shall give the birch-tree bark with all the signatures of volunteers a place of honour in my home.

Nearly all the volunteers spent the evening in a hall in Prague with sing-songs, slides and the designation of a steering-committee. After long discussions and as one of the volunteers mentioned a lesson in democracy, Zdaneck Teichman and Waslaw Brichacek were provisionally elected and will represent the "informal group". It was understood that Eugen Schart should go on having the correspondence with our European Secretariat etc. as before.

The next morning I left for home. Five friends saw me off at the main station.

It is evident that we as foreign friends can do very little in such a country, where regulations and policy differs so much from our own. We can prove our friendship and tell about SCI but that is nothing compared by what we receive in the CSSR as guests. My thanks go to Eugen Schart (Specially also for the performance of Rasulka by Dvorzak in the National Opera), Milada Havlikova, Zdaneck Teichman and family, Wazlaw Brichacek and Mrs. Schart, who looked after me as if I was a prince.

Catricum (Holland), April 4Th, 1967

Chris Hollaender.

Copies : ES
IS
Ex Cttee
Lutz Caspers, who will hand this
over to Eugen Schart