

## QUAKER WORKCAMPS.

Friends House,  
Euston Road,  
London, NW1.

International Work Camp at Tuchheim, East Germany - July 29th - August 19th, 1967.

Camp address : Internationales Studentenlager,  
Fiener Bruch,  
3281 Tuchheim  
Kreis Genthin,  
Schulstraße.  
D.D.R.

Hosts : Freie Deutsche Jugend (F.D.J.)

by Mike Harran

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### Partizipants :

There were 29 in number and represented in all 11 countries.

12 volunteers were sent by S.C.I. (from Great Britain, France, U.S.A., West Germany and Ceylon),

9 volunteers from the East European BITEJ (from USSR, CSSR, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Poland)

8 volunteers from the D.D.R. (F.D.J.) including 4 interpreters, 2 cooks and the camp leader.

There were 20 men and 9 girls (one of the French girls left for a work camp in Poland after the second week). Ages ranged from 19 to 30 + 1

### Accommodation :

We lived in the village "high school" and most of our meals were provided there for us. At weekends we had dinner in the village inn. Food was good and plentiful. We slept upstairs in three classrooms. Beds and bedding were provided and quite comfortable by work camp standards ! TV and radio, record-player, table-tennis, cigarettes etc. were available at the school and there were plenty of grounds for us to use - whenever we had spare emergency. Washbasins and showers were downstairs.

### Routine & Work :

The day began at 5.00 a.m. with the ringing of a very loud and unpleasant bell ( I never found out who got up first to ring the bell, but by the third week, most of us had acquired the capacity to sleep through its obnoxious sound !). Breakfast was at 5.15 - 5.30 a.m. and work was supposed to begin at 6.00.

We were taken to the site, 3 or 4 miles away, by a lorry which seemed to be lacking springs ! The lorry brought us back again in the evening - and also brought our midday meal. We worked for a state firm which was engaged by the co-operation farm to carry out a draining scheme for the "Fiener Bruch" area. This large, marshy area had been drained, to some extent, several times before, but since about 1926, no work had been done and the ditches - about 50 yards apart - were overgrown and useless. The present project involves clearing some of these old ditches and re-excavating them - thus reclaiming the area for valuable pastureland. When we arrived at the scene our ditches had been cleared and excavated by large machines (which we saw at work nearby). Our task was to smooth the sloping sides of the ditches, to lay faggots along the edges (retained by stakes in the water) and over these to lay sods of grass which we cut nearby. Grass seed was then down on the sides above the sods. In this way a firm bank was made which would not be eroded by the water - or cave in to block the ditch.

The work was moderately heavy - sometimes we had to cut the turf's completely by hand, sometimes they were cut in a long strip by machine - which made it easier for us. These sods were then passed along a human chair to one or two people in the water, who laid them over the faggots. There were two 'foremen' on the site (Kurt and Kurt) and another (also Kurt) who visited once or twice a week. The work was fairly well organised on the whole. We worked from 6.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m., with 30 minutes for breakfast at 9.00 and an hour for lunch (cooked at the inn and brought in sealed canisters) at 12.00. Tools and Wellington boots were provided (also blister cream !) and overalls were available for those who wanted them. The weather was very hot for much of the time and this did not make the work seem any lighter. Clothing was minimal and we were a source of obvious delight to the large numbers flesh eating flies which fed daily on us ! We got very dirty, but were able to shower when we got back to the school. We discussed at some length the questions of work units and competition - both within the camp and also between our camp and other FDJ groups working nearby. The head of the farm seemed to attach some importance to this, and once complained that we were not working as quickly as the FDJ groups - which reached daily percentages of up 135. However, I think that the whole camp agreed that the amount of work done was not a crucial question in our case - The foremen themselves never seemed dissatisfied with our work or rate of work and we got on with them very well. There was no question this year (from either FDJ or BITEJ members) of individual work achievement prizes.

#### LEADERSHIP AND GENERAL RUNNING :

The leader of the camp was a middle-aged school-teacher who had not been on such a camp before. As in previous camps in the DDR, he did not work with us, which was a great pity. However, Rolf was very pleasant and very sympathetic to our suggestions as to running of the camp. Initially it seemed as though everything was to be pre-organised for us (discussions, outings etc.) by Rolf, but after some discussion, a camp committee was set up consisting of the leader (FDJ), Vladimir (USSD - BITEJ) and Dave Brook (GB - SCI). These three gathered ideas and opinions on camp affairs from their respective groups, discussed them together and put their decisions to the whole camp for ratification. This system seemed to work quite well, though there were breakdowns and it was not always easy to find out what was to happen more than a day ahead. One or two participants I think felt that all matters of camp business should have been discussed by the whole camp. However, I feel that the size of the camp (27 +) and the not inconsiderable language problems would have meant spending a great deal of time on day to day matters rather than on more useful topics.

There was some dissention about the venue for our discussions in the evenings. Most of the Eastern group favoured the pub, while many of the SCI group felt that the atmosphere there was not conducive to serious discussions - a valid point. This resulted, on some evenings, in the group being split - though after the first couple of days we held most of our discussions in the school and when they finished, those who so wished went down to the Gaststätte - discussions then continued in smaller groups. I think that we found that, although the camp should try and think of itself as a single group, discussions involving the whole camp should not monopolise the evenings. In general at Tuchheim the evening would begin with everyone together and one or two people would give a talk on a specific topic (their own country, youth organisations, ideology etc.) after which questions were asked, answered and talked round. We then broke up spontaneously into smaller groups. Thus the talks were useful in that they provided an informative and often controversial basis for more individual deliberation, where true personal ideas and opinions were more readily expressed and exchanged. As we were told in the SCI briefing in Hanover, the statements made by the people from the East in front of the whole group were uniform and predictable in many cases.

I did feel towards the end of our three weeks that personal contacts in this context were appreciably hindered by a language barrier. Many people (from both East and West) did not speak a common language (German, Russian, English) sufficiently fluently to carry on an involved discussion without the aid of an interpreter - which of course slowed things down considerably. Both sides felt this and it did tend to keep us apart to some extent - though it is difficult to see how can be completely avoided.

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Unfortunately we left what I consider to be some of the most important topics of discussion until quite late in the camp - e. g. an evening on our sponsoring organisations (SCI - BITEJ - FDJ) a talk about Marxism (Leninism) and about the meanings of some terms such as "Imperialist" and "Capitalist" as used by Easterners. These were subjects which brought to light some of the more fundamental differences in our ways of thinking which could better have been exposed early in the camp. I for one did not appreciate, I don't think, the scope or depth of these differences during the first two weeks, and after that, there was not much time left ! - especially as we spent Tuesday und Wednesday of the last week sightseeing around Potsdam.

#### Other Discussions :

Other discussions we had were about our various countries (2 countries per evening over 3 or 4 evenings). These were interesting in themselves but it seems that all the Eastern countries are rather similar as are all the Western ones, and the usefulness of these evenings was somewhat limited. Also we were told how local government works by the Mayor and Council of Tuchheim, and were told about and shown co-operative farming. We saw slides of the DDR which included many of new modern buildings. We went once or twice to the "country" town of Genthin about 10 miles away; to the FDJ camp "Arthur Becker" at the other side of Tuchheim (they were working on the same project as we). Have we were greeted with cheers and armfuls of gladioli. Unfortunately, the rain put out the bonfire soon after we arrived and we had to retreat indoors ! We visited a washing powder factory in Genthin where we were very hospitably entertained (coffee and more gladioli !). We toured an old peoples home about 5 miles from Tuchheim, and the Kindergarten school next to ours. On all these occasions we were able to talk to the local people and we really enjoyed these visits for that reason. We found that people were most interested to meet young folk from the West, and we were always met with much friendliness. Time was our greatest bugbear (or rather lack of time) on these outings. A group of us went to a Catholic service in the village on the first Sunday and to the Protestant one the next - taking with us a few of the East Europeans. Later a number of us visited the local vicar at his home and spent some time chatting to him, his wife and two other young Christians (Apart from one Bulgarian girl we were all from SCI on this occasion). We learned much about the status of the church in the DDR today.

On Tuesday and Wednesday of the last week, we had an excursion to Potsdam. We were told that we were also to visit the concentration camp preserved at Sachsenhausen. There was much discussion about this, both among the SCI group and among the camp as a whole. We felt that the FDJ was quite determined that we should go there, but it was accepted that anyone who felt strongly that they should not go in could wait outside in the coach for the three hours. We felt that it might have caused grave offence to our hosts had we completely refused to go as Sachsenhausen (and other such camps) are reminders to East Germans that their state is dedicated to the hatred of Fascism and Militarism. This visit, I am sure, did no good for the camp and may even have soured relations somewhat. The visit to Potsdam on the Tuesday was interesting and again at Cäcilienhof (where the Potsdam agreement was signed) we were able to see quite clearly the way in which the East Europeans think and the things they are taught about the West and about their own history. This was another event which could have very profitably come in the first week of the camp. I feel with some confidence, that the questions and problems which the visit raised - fundamental as they were (concerning politics and ideology) would, like those raised in some of our other discussions, have been tackled with understanding and would not have caused an irreparable rift in the camp had they come earlier - as two people suggested at the end.

My general feelings on the camp in retrospect are mixed. I am sure that we did achieve something - some sort of insight and understanding of one another. We certainly learned something about one another and about other countries. It is hard to see just how this can be carried further now the camp is over - after all, 28 people out of the total population of 11 countries is not many. I have wondered whether in a fourth week we would have achieved more or whether instead we would have just raised further problems.

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Of course, there must be more camps like the Tuchheim one - as many as possible, and people who go on them should try to go with a truly open mind to get the most out of a relatively brief encounter. It would be most interesting to hear the views of the participants from the Socialist countries on this

and other such camps (We hoped to hear something of this is an evaluation session on the penultimate day of the camp, but this meeting somehow never materialised !).

There is so much more to say which is largely a matter of personal opinion, but I hope this report is of some help to those who read it.

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