

Origin of SCI's East-West activities

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NEEDS COMPLETION

German Democratic Republic 1954 - 1977 (DDR)

First official contacts with FREIE DEUTSCHE JUGEND (FDJ = "Free German Youth") were looked for by the secretariat of the French branch in May 1954. There was no reply. However, some students from Leipzig took part in an ACI camp in Austria (rubble clearing after landslide).

In October 1955 the WORLD FEDERATION OF DEMOCRATIC YOUTH (WFDY) invited SCI, together with Freie Deutsche Jugend, to the "Spartakiade" in Leipzig to organize "separate activities". At that time the German Democratic Republic was in need of international attention. The invitation was carefully studied by SCI. However, the conditions placed on volunteers by FDJ (no common responsibility and no leisure time activities organized by volunteers themselves) were considered insufficient. Besides, Austrian and Federal Republic of Germany SCI members expected difficulties with their government, if the offer was accepted unconditionally. Further negotiations did not bring any substantial changes.

In summer 1956 in way of private contacts and the help of WFDY a limited exchange of volunteers became possible : SCI sent a few volunteers to a WFDY / FDJ camp at Leipzig and welcomed some FDJ volunteers at a specially organized SCI / WFDY camp at Bonnat / France. There was a small incident connected with this exchange showing how difficult relationship was at that time : A Festival Group" at Stuttgart / FRG had mixed in one of their publications news about the camps in Leipzig and Bonnat concerning common responsibilities. The secretary of the SCI German branch immediately protested and asked ultimatively for revocation in the next publication of the Festival Group; he insisted that SCI had "nothing to do" with the WFDY / FDJ camp in Leipzig. This was not quite true because other branches than SCI FRG had in fact sent some volunteers to that camp.

More than a year later, in December 1957, the 'Zentralrat' of the FDJ wrote to SCI at Zürich asking for information about sending volunteers to a camp in Tunisia "they had heard SCI wanted to organize". An immediate invitation did not receive any reply.

New contacts between SCI and FDJ were made at the World Youth Festival in July - August 1961 at Moscow. After considerable internal discussions SCI FRG agreed to the participation of FDJ volunteers in SCI camps (but that SCI should not use FDJ as channel to receive SCI volunteers ?!) and to a tripartite FDJ / WFDY / SCI camp in the GDR (DDR). At its 29th meeting the SCI international committee asked the European Secretary to establish contacts officially with FDJ.

The agreement worked out and agreed settled in details a camp project in the GDR for the following year : 45 volunteers should take part; 1/3 from GDR, 1/3 from Eastern and 1/3 from Western countries. The camp took place at Paaren-Glien near Potsdam, from 7th to 27th July 1963. It was a fairly satisfactory experiment. Nevertheless, when SCI FRG informed diplomatically their Government, the relevant Ministry (Bundesministerium für Familien- und Jugendfragen) expressed reserves concerning cooperation with FDJ. On the other hand " . . . FDJ will accept West German volunteers without hesitation, whereas it is unable to accept West Berlin volunteers until a general agreement is reached with West Berlin authorities . . . " (extract from a report on a visit in March 1964 by the then SCI European Secretary Janet Goodricke at Berlin).

Tripartite camps continued in the following years. Gradually the SCI FRG and FDJ GRD got more and more involved in exchange of volunteers and did not find restrictions anymore.

However, relationship with FDJ stayed for a long time rather formal (for so-called security reasons ?), in spite of friendly personal contacts on both sides. A special agreement by writing had to be signed every year, again approved by the East Berlin continue cooperation. How touchy feelings remained, showed a small incident in 1967 : a Western German volunteer in a FDJ camp spoke inadvertently of "Mitteldeutschland" instead of DDR. It led to an official complaint.

Until 1969 the SCI European secretary travelled every year to Berlin to sign the usual contract for FDJ / SCI camps. From 1970 on documents concerning cooperation with FDJ - GDR are missing in the SCI international archives, except an information paper dated 4th January 1977 out of which the following may be quoted : " . . . A courtesy visit to FDJ at Berlin has been made. In spite of satisfactory past experience of cooperation with SCI, for various reasons it is not possible at present for FDJ to have common camps and to exchange volunteers officially. But FDJ is interested to maintain friendly contacts and envisages to send a few volunteers to SCI camps. FDJ would also welcome some in their national brigades. But applications would have to be made to the National Communist Youth which has contacts with FDJ."

Who can provide complementary information on the follow-up of relationship with the FDJ or any other group in the GDR / DDR since 1968 ? Thanks to anybody who will help to complete the documents in the SCI international archives (c/o Ralph Hegnauer, POB 117, CH Affoltern am Albis, Switzerland).

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