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„Not working in silence"

[Subtitle :] A look back on the SCI *Model service* on the *Kasernenareal*, the former army barracks area in Basel (Switzerland) in 1976

By Philipp Rodriguez, Coordinator SCI International Archives

[Lead :] In SCI nobody doubts that political changes in 1968 in the West caused far-reaching changes in the SCI movement too (see box). Some even speak of a „break" provoked by a new policy based on a left-wing standpoint or politics in general. But it was more than that. The *third SCI generation*[1] introduced new visions and developed new workcamp concepts. In order to understand this change, this article is focusing upon a single project.

The *Model Service*[2] (MZD76), which was organised 1976 in Basel (Switzerland), is an example of this new spirit. Volunteers, mainly conscientious objectors (COs), worked during three months on a former army barracks area in order to change it to a „communication centre" for the neighbourhood. But MZD76 was more than practical help to the needs of the residents.

The workcamp in the International Archives in 1999 organised a meeting with former participants and talked about their visions and experiences of that time.

[Introduction to the Project :] Peaceful Transformation in Basel
When the army closed the *Kaserne* (barracks) close to the river Rhine 1967, a big area in the middle of the *Kleinbasler* neighbourhood became free for other purposes. Several private investors made known their interest for this area in order to use it as a car parking or a supermarket, and impeded for years a final use. A citizens action committee proposed an use *ad interim* in 1973 in order to „let

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[1] Term inspired by the historical concept of Ralph Hegnauer with three generations of SCI activists (I. 1920-1944, II. 1945-67, III. 1968-). See „Beweggründe des Service Civil International" by Ralph Hegnauer (24.12.96) (not published)

[2] *Modellzivildienst* (MZD) is the original German term. The English word „Alternative service" which is used normally in relation with conscientious objecting doesn't explain the meaning of *Modellzivildienst* properly and is replaced therefore by the word *Model Service*.

develop" a free place for and by the neighbourhood. As a first step an attic was transformed into a playroom for children by this action group, called *Interessengemeinschaft Kasernenareal* (IKA), and the SCI local group. But building regulations demanded some construction work for the further social and cultural revival of the area.
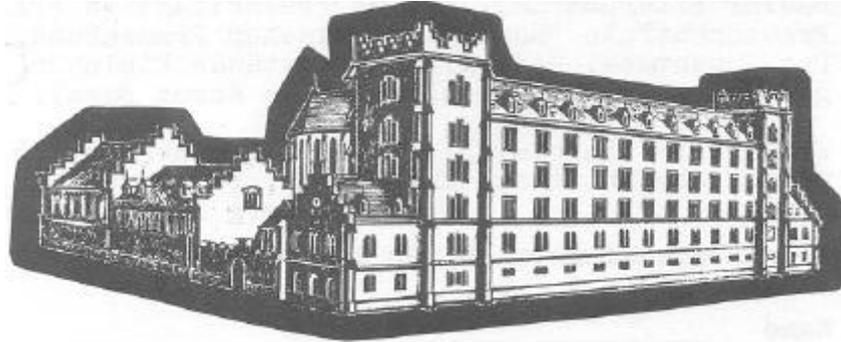
The *Kaserne* in Basel

At the same time a working group of SCI Switzerland wrote a concept for an alternative Service for COs. The practical consequences of this concept[3], published in 1974, were the so called *Model Services*, which were organised from 1974 until 1976. MZD76, the fourth and last of them, was organised together with the IKA as a construction project for the barracks transformation. At the same time it was a practical act toward the SCI vision of an alternative service.

The CO Working group is working on the Concept in Lüen (Pagig) 1973

The idea to organise workcamps in order to give a practical proof for an alternative service, instead of prison for COs, is very old in SCI. Already the second workcamp in *Vers l'Eglise* (Switzerland) in 1924, organised by Pierre Ceresole, had this aim[4]. It

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[3] Schweizerische Vereinigung für Internationalen Zivildienst [SCI CH] : Zivildienstkonzept, Vorschläge zur Schaffung eines Zivildienstes in der Schweiz. Basel (1974)

[4] See e.g M.Vuilleumier : Une expérience de servic civil. Semeur vaudois 13.9.24

stayed in the political agenda of SCI Switzerland until 1996 when officially an alternative service was introduced in Switzerland.

Eleven volunteers from Switzerland and Germany, all men in the age from 19 to 27 years took part in MZD76, which lasted 3 months, July until September. The group lived in former quarters of the *Kaserne* with a small living room and cooking facilities. They worked around 35 hours a week according to the working plan set up by the IKA.

In the sense of self governance and self determination the preparatory group did not set up many rules in MZD76. The idea was to give as much freedom to the group.

Nevertheless the project partners and SCI had various expectations in the work, theory, public relation, animation and group dynamics of MZD76.

[Public relation and Animation :] „Not working in silence"

The work of the volunteers should not be isolated from the neighbourhood and the city. „Not working in silence was our aim" says Andreas from the preparatory group.

A communication plan was set up and five newsletters were issued before the project had even started. 500 leaflets were distributed and advertisements in the alternative press were made in order to find volunteers for MZD76. Later a press documentation was made and a press conference informed about the start of the project in July[5]. From then on the volunteers were in charge for the public relation and the contacts with the press continued.

The press for example was invited when the volunteers demolished a wall in order allow a better access to the area; a symbolic act for the opening of the area for the neighbourhood. „We had excellent contacts to journalists" says Benno, one volunteer of MZD76.

MZD76 Volunteers breaking the wall (Basler Abendezeitung 4.8.76)

But also direct contacts to people of the neighbourhood were considered as important. Especially the children from the neighbourhood discovered that something happened on the site. „Those children weren't calm but neglected, aggressive and edgy. That are children which are created by their environment and

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[5] Modell-Zivildienst im Kasernen-Areal. Basler Abendzeitung 28.7.76

our system" is written in the final report. With success some volunteers started to animate them.

Other volunteers made experiments in public with *Guerilla Theatre*, an animation technique of the 70s. E.g. loud and fictive talks about conscientious objection in public were hold in order to attract attention to passers-by. But also the asking for food in order to save money, created simple contacts to the neighbourhood.

The highlight of the project was the Rhine ferry festival in August. With enthusiasm the group organised an alternative program to the official festivities. Hans, a participant of MZD76, emphasises : „It was a festival where you can do something without money". Declared as „the different festival", activities with children, a wheel chair *rally* and Variété theatre were organised on the *Kasernenareal*.

But not everything went well. The group opposed to the presence of the army which installed two additional ferries during the festival. As a consequence of the public anti-militaristic statements of the group, the ferry festival committee stopped the cooperation with MZD76. Ruedi from the IKA and project coordinator of MZD76 says : "Since then I'm a *persona non grata* for the festival committee".

„In spite of the difficulties (with the festival committee), the festival on the Kasernenareal was a success.", concluded the *Abend Zeitun*g of Basel after the festival[6].

[Group Dynamics :] „We are not a Collective but a Collection!"

Until the late 60s the leadership of a SCI service was traditionally split between a working leader and a *headsister*, who take care of the kitchen. Sometimes there was also a *spiritual leader*[7]. So called *House Meetings* were introduced after 1945 for discussion and the promotion of democratic order in the group and tp replaced the authoritarian workcamp organisation from Ceresole. But „self discipline" of the volunteers and control was still important. In that sense work efficiency and motivation of the volunteers was evaluated and reported to the SCI secretary[8].

The change in the SCI from 1968 to 1972 introduced new workcamp concepts. In Switzerland the already mentioned „Zivildienstkonzept" of 1974, a product of the long term service in *Schanfigg Pagig* (1969 - 1976), had a pioneering role in this. It demanded a *„sensitivity training* for group dynamics" in order to enable a group life without hierarchical order and structural violence.

In MZD76 a such sensitivity training was organised in the first week by a specialised group animator. Besides the necessary introduction to the project, the participants should learn to become a group where fears and hopes could be freely expressed. „All participants - which show a defined attitude of the expectation towards the *Model service* - shall be able to contribute their needs, experiences and information (to the group) and justify them" is explained in the 4th newsletter of MZD76. In that sense self governance and self determination without leaders shall be enabled within the project.

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[6] Sie kamen und sahen. Basler Abendzeitung 31.8.76

[7] This three leader model was introduced by Pierre Ceresole from the beginning on. His brother Ernest, who was a colonel in the army, was usually work leader, while a woman, like Claerly Knuchel, managed the kitchen. Pierre preferred to do manual work like the others. But after work he was the *spiritual leader* who spread the so called „Zivildienstgeist" (spirit of the SCI) among the volunteers.

[8] See e.g SCI International Secretary : Wegleitung fuer die Organisation eines Zivildienstes. Paris (1950)

At work. MZD76

Although the volunteers were willing to live in a non-hierarchical group, following the trend of the 70s, conflicts emerged from the beginning because of difficulties in finding a find common approach. The group faced these problems with long discussions and group games like the already mentioned *Guerrilla Theatre*. The weekly reports mention also a so called „hot seat" which was a kind of open feedback round toward a single member of the group. „We have to learn to tell each other how things are, how we perceive the group [...]" is what Dieter wrote about the „hot seat" in his report.

Benno explains that this caused the division of the group into an „ideological" and a „pragmatic" wing. For the „pragmatic" volunteers, including him, the work was more important than the group processes and the „psychological games" of the others. Others claim that it was not possible to form a single group because of the different backgrounds of the volunteers. In the 4th week report it is even concluded that „we were not a collective but a collection".

The pressure to be a group impeded more and more common activities although the group decided to concentrate on group life rather than on activities for public relation. But after the ferry festival, where the volunteers worked very close and intensively together due to the open confrontation with the festival committee, the group lost also a common daily structure. As a consequence the volunteers left the camp individually without any final event.

There are several explanations why the group split up. However MZD76 was an extraordinary experience, the act of the volunteers which were under social pressure : Family, professional career and the compulsory military service. Two of them were COs, who had to line up for their prison sentence just after MZD76.

COs go in prison. Manifestation in front of the *Lohnhof* in Basel (1982(?))

[Conclusion :] A Look Back

The reports of the participants, the IKA and the SCI final report do not spare their criticism, frustration and unhappiness about MZD76, although the working program was fulfilled.

After 23 years things have changed. The former participants see MZD76 as an important life experience. Benno holding today a leading position an a big company today, even admits : „I learned then to manage people, so that their are not aware of it". Hans, today an organic farmer and an adult educator, says „I came from an authoritarian family and I lived in a authoritarian society. At that time I was depending on leaders but at the same time I revolted against them." He objected his military service in collective with others three years later.

MZD76 was a success for the transformation process of the *Kasernenareal*. Ruedi concludes today that „the *Model Service* was like a Trojan horse". Through the presence, public relations and contacts of the group with the neighbourhood it was possible to establish the barracks as an intercultural institution in Basel. After the MZD76 IKA was able to acquire more and more room and space for other organisations and cultural activities in the area. Today two animators work with children and for a youth meeting point of the neighbourhood. In spite of various complications with authorities until today, the use *ad interim* became a permanent use. As a recognition for the long involvement, the IKA received the Swiss *Heimatschutzpreis* (price for preservation and use of historic-cultural monuments) in 1993.[9]

For sure the disappointed expectations were the reason that no further model services were organised. But MZD76 was also a project on a big scale for SCI which demanded a lot of involvement of the activists. With more than 10 cm thick file it is also one of the best documented single service in SCI International Archives. But also the foundation of the *Swiss Conference for Alternative Service* in 1976, a

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[9] See also Ruedi Bachmann : Rückblick- und Ausblick eines Kasernenareal-Begeisterten, 25 Jahre Interessengemeinschaft Kasernenareal - 5 Jahre Quartiertreffpunkt, ikablatt. Basel (Juni 1999) p3

political platform for conscientious objecting, was the reason that SCI Switzerland was able to set new priorities, for instance the support of alternative communities in the Alps.

However for the Swiss CO working group an alternative service was more than a service for and with COs. It should be a *service of civilians* for peace, education and politics which contributes to the change of society and creates awareness to social problems within society.

The *model service* in Switzerland as a consequence of the changes in SCI of 1968 was not unique in the SCI world. Several SCI branches around that time organised new forms of workcamps and activities with a social and political approach. In that sense the *model service* was an experiment with an avant-gardistic spirit for new ways of life within society. It is a further example of the pioneer character of SCI in civil society.

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[Box :] Change in SCI
Though the number of volunteers and workcamps increased, the late 60s a were a turning point for SCI. The workcamp concept with the idea of helping disadvantaged people or regions did not satisfy SCI activists who had new visions of social justice and awareness.

In April 1969 a seminar in Uddel (Netherlands) was organised in order to discuss new visions and to find a common policy. But also the centralist structure of the International coordination was criticised. The 42nd *International Committee Meeting* (ICM) in October 1969 decided therefore to the declare the years of 1969-1971 as a period for new experiment and no ICMs were held.

As a consequence of this process the International Co-ordination lost importance and several branches set focus on own projects in the 70s. European and Asian coordination was set up and a process towards decentralised federation started. The reporting of branches to International Secretary was reduced.