

A M E R I C A N F R I E N D S S E R V I C E C O M M I T T E E

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F O R E I G N S E R V I C E S E C T I O N

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A N E F F O R T A T R E C O N S T R U C T I O N

In days darkened by destruction, it is heartening to hear of efforts at reconstruction, small though they may be. During the past year, four International Work Camps were held in Germany under the auspices of the International Voluntary Service for Peace.

Work Camps are something more than an effort in physical reconstruction. They are also an attempt to build international understanding by affording an opportunity for young people of various nations to work together on a common project.

The Work Camps this summer were held at Oberhausen, Duisburg, Hannover and Freiburg.

The Camp in Oberhausen was held for ten weeks from the 20th of July to the 27th of September. The work accomplished was the construction of a playground for children in the rubble of an old cement works where a refugee colony lived.

In Duisburg, "Maria in der Drucht" is a convalescent colony for German refugees from the Eastern Provinces. The Work Camp helped to build more permanent buildings than the wooden huts in which the refugees are living.

In Hannover, the work was in an old people's and mental hospital at Langenhagen. Here the International Work Camp helped clear away 850 cubic meters of rubble from the buildings which had been bombed.

In Freiburg they worked hard at rebuilding a children's hospital at the University of Freiburg.

Under the Friends Relief Service, camps of similar nature were held in Berlin, Aachen, and Hildesheim.

The following is an article written by Bob Byrd of the American Friends Service Committee for the weekly educational supplement of The London Times on a Work Camp held in the Technical University of Berlin.

"The Technical University is located along the main East-West thoroughfare in Berlin. The Tiergarten is to one side. The Kaiser-Wilhelm Gedächtnis Kirche is just down the street in the center of what used to be Berlin's gay theatrical, art and night-club district. In ordinary times it is probably a good thing for a University to be centrally located. In wartime it may not be. The University became a fortress. Berliner Strasse was a no-man's land between the Russian and German armies during the last days before Berlin fell in April, 1945. The German forces ensconced themselves in the University buildings and the Russians attacked from the other side of the street. There was little but rubble, odd bits of wall and hollow shells of buildings left after the Germans withdrew to make their final stand at the big Zoo

bunker a few hundred yards to the East and South. Early last summer bodies of hastily buried German soldiers were still being uncovered by students and professors as they worked in their vegetable gardens on the University grounds.

"Some eighty University students, men and women, from Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, France, England, Java, Venezuela, and the United States and all four Zones of Germany and Berlin came to the University last summer. But they did not come to study. They came to spend their vacations helping to rebuild what the war had destroyed. They remained six weeks and contributed 6,500 man hours of labor. When all was summed up they found 26,500 bricks had been laid, 400 cement slabs were made into floors and ceilings, 15 cubic meters of mortar and 15 cubic meters of cement were worked into construction, 5 tons of iron beams were put into place, 8,000 bricks were salvaged, 7 tons of iron were salvaged and 250 cubic meters of rubble were removed.

"The principal end-product of all this labor was the reconstruction of a corridor between two buildings. Though this corridor makes it possible to pass from one building to another by a shorter route -- and a dry route -- the corridor's most important function is to make central heating available to the second building, and to open up a number of new class rooms and a lecture hall seating 1,000 people. What that means to Germany can only be realized when one hears students tell of coming to cold class rooms a half an hour or an hour early in order to be certain of a seat during a lecture.

"Another more important result was that a sense of purpose and usefulness was brought into the lives of many of the students . . . and this wasn't true only of the German students. It was this joy of purpose and usefulness which probably led one of the foreign girls to exclaim early one morning . . . 'For the first time in my life I'm happy to get up and have a whole day ahead of me.' There was the boy, too, who wrote back after the camp -- 'It was so good . . . at last to feel that one was doing something concrete, useful and constructive.' And there was the German boy who confided that hopelessness and lack of purpose had driven him to a point where he was ready to join an underground movement in one of the Zones --- but he decided to try the workcamp as a final effort to find a constructive alternative.

"There wasn't much said about 'democracy,' as such, in the camp. But the group was asked to select its own chairman, its own Domestic Affairs, Work and Leisure Time Committees and camp meetings were held once a week. It wasn't easy going. German students weren't accustomed to the use of group processes in arriving at decisions. They weren't sensitive of the point at which one stops pushing individual ideas or insisting on details. That's a hard lesson for those of us brought up on democracy and is not learned in six weeks, nor six years, but progress was made.

"Ranking high on the list of reactions among the German students was their amazement and joy at meeting and living with young people from other countries whom they found to be warm, friendly, kind, interested and faced by the same One World that is confronting the Germans. One must remember that these German students weren't more than eight or nine years old when National Socialism came to Germany and they have been raised on the belief that foreigners are a completely different species of being -- and not only different, but inferior. When this doctrine is coupled with a virtual ten-year isolation from non-Army and non-official elements in other countries, is it any wonder that one of the girls in the group was heard to say, 'I had no idea that foreigners were so human!'

"It was difficult when we came to breaking camp. One of the girls expressed it by saying, 'I've caught a vision here . . . a sense of community . . . a glimpse of what life can be like and I can't bear to go back to that dullness and lack of vision in which I'll lose my vision rather than bringing my vision to others.' The beds had to be taken back from where they had been borrowed . . . but fifteen or twenty stayed on and slept on the roof or piles of straw the first night after the camp closed, officially. Each day a few mustered up enough courage to leave, but it was a week before the last had gone."

There follow extractions from the log of Camp which proves that it wasn't all work. July 18-30:

"Friday - The Berlin students move in after supper, put their beds up and get straw mattresses in order. Finish at 11:30 by flashlight. Some 32 of us spent the night together. Our first meeting tonight. We discuss general program and purposes together. Mr. John Harvey, Chairman of IVSP Board of Directors, visits us.

"Sunday - Morning free - some go to Quaker Meeting for worship. Tour of Berlin in the afternoon. Opening tea in the Mensa in late afternoon. Words of welcome from Joerg Glodnick, Prof. Wille and Prof. D'Ans of the University. After supper an informal meeting at which John Larsson presents the history and ideas behind the camp movement.

"Monday - First day on work project. 'The Wall' begins to rise in the afternoon. The first of the press and radio people are at hand.

"Tuesday - Each room selects representatives for business meeting. Committees on work, domestic and free time.

"Wednesday - Group visits Technical University Student Parliament in the afternoon. Robert Bierley, Educational Advisor to the British Authorities, spoke after supper on student life in England and the necessity for a return to the international character of University education. William Huntington, European Commissioner of the American Friends Service Committee, visited during afternoon and evening.

"Thursday - News received that the Magistrate of the City of Berlin has approved 2,000 marks to support the Camp.

"Friday - Dr. Sophie Quast, Berlin Social Worker, with us for the evening. Spoke on problems of youth, especially delinquent youth, in Berlin.

"Monday - Celebrate Louise's birthday. The University treats us to the performance of the opera 'Martha' at the Staedtische Oper. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer came to shoot the first of our three news-reels.

"Tuesday - The second Camp Business Meeting. Camp Chairman elected."

August 8 - 30:

"Monday - Anna Bidder returns to us for the evening and discusses Quakerism.

"Wednesday - To the Russian House of Culture to see the movie 'Die steinere Blume.' A farewell party in the evening following the movie. Elmore McKee visits us with Harold Chance of the American Friends Service Committee. Sven leaves to return to Sweden.

"Thursday - The first group exodus from the camp: Hank, Bunnie, Eugen and Gerrit leave. Meeting to talk about plans for the future.

"Monday - Discussion in the evening with Lucille Day about minority problems and ways of meeting them.

"Tuesday - Magda Kelber, Friends Relief Service Advisory Officer, visits us.

"Wednesday - Monique back from hospital and we see her off to Berlin.

"Thursday - Frau Louise Schroeder, Oberbuergermeisterin for Berlin, spends an hour or so with us in the evening discussing problems of Berlin administration.

"Friday - Our official closing tea and our Abschieds Abend. We seal our scroll into 'The Wall.'

"Saturday - Our last day, officially. Beds taken down and returned. A final evening on the Wannsee together for those of us remaining."

A HAPPIER NEW YEAR!