

THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE was written by David S. Richie, Executive Secretary of the Friends Social Order Committee, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Friends, for publication in the John Dewey Society's 1950 Yearbook, Education for a World Society. This book is scheduled to be published in the fall.

### WORKING TOGETHER IN INTERNATIONAL CAMPS

"Our common aim is to build peace through small international groups of volunteers working, living, and learning together."

Thus agreed the 25 representatives of ten voluntary agencies organizing work camps during a conference held in October, 1947, at Askov, Denmark.

This one-sentence summary of the purpose of all the 50 such working groups in that year was the result of an evolving philosophy that had its beginnings in the mind of a Swiss war resister, Pierre Ceresole, back in the first world war.

His readiness to put his concern for peace and brotherhood into concrete action inspired both French and Germans to join him in the first international work camp, clearing the rubble and building peasant huts near Verdun in France in 1920.

Other "services" followed particularly at times of natural catastrophes such as the flood of the Rhine in Liechenstein in 1928 when more than 700 volunteers from 22 different countries responded to the emergency call: "The week's work will be 48 hours. It will be hard. Volunteers will be lodged in tents, barns and empty buildings. Work will have to be done in the rain."

Thus the volunteers were challenged to give their best, to voluntarily accept a strict discipline, to bear a living witness to the faith that was in them that man could live at peace.

It was the great hope of the Swiss leader of this movement, called the Service Civil International, that such international voluntary service could be recognized as a legal alternative to Swiss compulsory military service, but this hope has not been fulfilled and a number of these leaders have had to "serve" in prison as well.

Nevertheless the movement spread and significant projects were carried out in France, England, and other European countries as well as in India before the second world war.

In 1934 the "work camp" idea was adapted to America. There was not military conscription in America at that time, but there were serious unsolved social problems of unemployment, poverty and racial tension. And an urgent need was felt to give people the opportunity to study these problems first hand and to earn the right to do so by contributing their own manual labor.

The first camp was sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee and was held at Westmoreland Homestead, a new community being built by the Federal Government for the terribly housed coal miners. The 50 volunteers helped to put in the water system, digging the reservoir and several miles of ditch.

Their labor earned a welcome from the embittered coal miners that made a deep impression upon the volunteers. Actually the educational impact of this experience upon the campers -- their discovery of the significance of manual labor, their exposure to the human needs of those struggling for an opportunity to live -- was

evidenced in many "changed lives," lives that have been dedicated ever since to social betterment.

Since then the American Friends Service Committee, the American Youth Commission, the United Christian Youth Movement and other church denominational groups have sponsored an increasing number of work camps primarily directed toward socializing the attitudes of the participants, awakening in them both a deep respect for manual labor and for all those who do manual labor, and also a deep devotion to the struggle for social justice by non-violent means.

In 1946, after the second world war, came the first opportunity for the basic objectives of the American and European work camp movements to cross-fertilize. The first work camps in Europe sponsored by the AFSC were held that summer in Finland and in Italy with veteran European campers and English and American volunteers participating. In that year also there were American volunteers in work camps sponsored by the European Service Civil International in Norway and in France.

In the fall of 1946, delegates of five peace organizations (the Service Civil International, Internationella Arbetslag of Sweden, the Fredsvenners Hjelpetjeneste of Norway, the Mellemfolklig Samvirke of Denmark, and the American Friends Service Committee), interested in international work camps, met in Brussels to share the experiences gained in camps and to study how a closer relationship could be established. It was quickly discovered that by pooling experiences and resources the whole work camp movement would benefit. It was decided, therefore, that the International Secretariat of the S.C.I. in Paris should act as a Liaison Office for the following year, helping to coordinate all these efforts toward international co-operation.

During 1947, the interchange of campers and the integration of the two movements went much farther. In the spring the first leadership training work camp was held at Boussu-Bois in Belgium with both Europeans and Americans participating. Also during this spring, the leadership of UNESCO recognized the potential contribution of international work camps to reconstruction and education for international understanding and offered their assistance with educational aids and joint sponsorship.

This proved to be particularly significant in making possible the first international work camp in Poland, which was organized by the AFSC in that summer. At the destroyed village of Lucimia a group of 18 Polish university students were joined by a dozen veteran work campers from other parts of Europe to build a barrack school and to assist in the reconstruction of the peasant huts. An outdoor school was held for 150 children and a medical clinic served almost 500 patients during the eight weeks' period.

One day toward the end of the summer a Polish volunteer hurried back to the tent camp by the Vistula River to report that an elderly villager had tried to thank her for the camp by saying: "You know, before you came we were asleep, but now we are awake," and then thoughtfully, the camper added, "That's true of us Polish campers, too."

Later in the winter, another Polish camper reported a visit back to the isolated Lucimia and on the continued progress of the villagers. She concluded with this evidence, however, that the most important progress was still in the lives of the volunteers: "You cannot ever imagine how happy it makes me to realize that there are no barriers that could not be surmounted by doing together constructive

work. Human hearts are made for love and not for hatred and people are much happier if they are given the opportunity not only to love but to manifest their love by active work."

The result of many such experiences during the summer of 1947 was that the representatives of the work camp organizations from 14 countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States) could gather at Askov in October and heartily agree upon their common objective: "Our common aim is to build peace through small international groups of volunteers working, living, and learning together."

Working together came first. Living together and learning together had been proven to be significant in dozens of international conferences. Now, however, at Askov, working together was recognized and affirmed as the prime essential for the restoration of faith, the purification of spirit and the enlargement of loyalty in our battle-scarred youth upon whom the hope of world peace depends. Working together for the welfare of those in need, regardless of who they are, is the surest way of convincing the skeptics and of training the kind of vigorous, unselfish, world conscious leadership we need.

It was with a deep sense of unity of purpose and grave responsibility that this Askov conference set up a Liaison Office in Paris to promote and expand this movement. The Liaison Office now serves as the Secretariat for the Association of International Work Camps for Peace, composed of the members of the Askov conference. In the spring of 1948, UNESCO called together a still larger conference including representatives of the World Federation of Democratic Youth which has sponsored large camps for tens of thousands of young people in the eastern European countries. This conference set up a continuing Coordination Committee and UNESCO itself has increased its assistance to the work camps by sending libraries and visiting resource leaders to the camps and by publishing helpful publicity.

During the summer of 1949, several thousands of volunteers participated in over 100 camps in almost every country in Europe and in Algeria, Mexico, Jamaica, Guatemala, Cuba, Paraguay, Japan, Canada, and the United States. A number of the camps are operated on a year-round basis such as the Internationella Arbetslag camp in Hildesheim, Germany, the Espelkamp near Bielfeld, Germany, sponsored by the Mennonite Central Committee, the UNESCO-Mexican Government pilot project in Nayarit, Mexico, administered by the American Friends Service Committee, and others.

In the past, the exchange of volunteers has been a one-way proposition with Americans being sent to camps in Europe and Asia with very few volunteers coming to the United States. This year, the international work camp movement was enriched by the participation of volunteers in United States camps representing Austria, Canada, China, Denmark, England, Finland, Italy, Luxembourg, Mexico, Germany, Norway and Sweden.

International organizations and federations participating in the international work camp program include the International Union of Students, the International Youth Hostel Federation, the Association of International Work Camps for Peace, the Service Civil International, the World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Association, the World Council of Churches, the World Federation of Democratic Youth, and the World Union of Jewish Students. Branches of the Service Civil International exist in Algeria, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Saar, and Switzerland. Members of the Association of International Work Camps for Peace include the Service Civil International, Mellemfolkelig Samvirke

(Denmark), Kainsainvälinen Vapaasehtoinen Työleirijärjestö (Finland), The American Friends Service Committee, Friends Service Council (England), and Internationella Arbetslag (Sweden). "Affiliated members" will be the Congregational Christian Service Committee, the Friends Ambulance Unit (both subject to consultation), Fredsvennernes Hjalpetjeneste (Norway), Mennonite Service Committee, and the Brethren Service Commission.

Organizations in the United States sponsoring work camps abroad include the American Friends Service Committee, American Youth Hostels, the Baptist Youth Fellowship, the Brethren Service Commission, the Congregational Christian Service Committee, the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical and Reformed Church, the Experiment in International Living, the Fieldston School, the Mennonite Central Committee, the Methodist Youth Department, the National Intercollegiate Christian Council, the National Lutheran Council, the Presbyterian Church, the Unitarian Service Committee, the Universalist Service Committee, and the World Council of Churches. The AFSC, the Brethren Service Commission, the Episcopal Church, Five Years Meeting (Richmond, Indiana), the Evangelical and Reformed Church, the Fellowship of Southern Churches, the World Council of Churches, the Unitarian Service Committee, the Presbyterian Church, and the Methodist Youth Department also sponsor work camps in the United States.

During the summer of 1949 a variety of jobs were done. Eighty young people dug a new sanitation system for the college at Le Chambon in France. Ten workers helped paint furniture for the boys' rooms and cleared a couple of acres of land for a ball field at Druhwald, Germany. At Bremen, a road was built and playground centers for the children established. In Finland, the campers helped to clear land and to build new homes for the Karelian refugees. In Paraguay, the volunteers helped to improve agricultural practices. At the Hakodate camp in Japan, the campers built a children's playground, repaired roads and planted trees and shrubs in the repatriate settlement of Goryokaku. In Jamaica, a dining-kitchen shed was built for the underprivileged boys of "Boys Town."

It is difficult to draw a blue-print of the planning and program behind this diversity of work camps. Perhaps one of the most thorough handbooks issued to date on work camps is Organizing International Voluntary Work Camps, prepared by Willy Begert, International Secretary of Service Civil International, and published by UNESCO.

In a section titled "The Organization of Camps," Willy Begert lists among the main points the selection of the work project, finances, camp personnel, volunteers, preparing a camp, travel, and the educational program.

In the selection of the work project, the UNESCO handbook suggests three primary considerations: (1) the specific aim of the work camp organization -- to give material help in emergencies, reconciliation and work for peace, education, bringing together specific groups; (2) resources available -- staff, volunteers, money, equipment, materials; and (3) the local labor situation.

The methods generally used for financing work camps are as follows: (1) work camp organizations are able to pay administration and maintenance cost through subscriptions and donations; (2) the work is done for another organization which pays for the maintenance of the volunteers; (3) special appeals are launched to provide the necessary funds for a particular project; (4) the local community pays for the maintenance of the campers, either completely or partly, as well as for tools and the equipment for the camp; (5) the campers earn wages at standard rates; (6) the

government and/or other official agencies make grants for the work; and (7) volunteers themselves pay for their participation in camp. Oftentimes more than one method is used by any one camp.

Undoubtedly the most important single factor of the camp personnel depends on the selection of a good camp leader and a nucleus of experienced volunteers. Most organizations recruit their leaders, or co-leaders in some cases, from among their own members because they wish to fill this responsible post with people having a full knowledge of their aims and methods.

In preparing a camp, not only is it necessary to find adequate living accommodations, but it is important to inform local authorities about the work camp and give them full information about the work camp organization, to make necessary arrangements about food purchasing, to secure an agreement as to the scope of the work to be done, and to decide upon the opening and closing dates of the camp in relation to the availability for the campers. At "headquarters," a permanent camp staff and all volunteers should be selected, information about the project should be sent to all concerned, the volunteers and the cooperating groups, a budget covering the whole duration of the camp should be drawn up, a provisional educational program should be prepared, all travel arrangements should be cleared with each volunteer, and if equipment has to be sent to camp, this should be done before camp opens.

The success of a camp, more often than not, depends on the adequacy of the preliminary ground work, and therefore the importance of this aspect of work camping cannot be overstressed.

Once set up, camps have varying programs, but a rather typical camp program with its pleasures and problems could be described in the story of one of the international work camps held in Europe during a recent summer.

The campers arose at five-thirty not to the ringing of an alarm clock, but to the tune of a violin and a "baby" organ played by two of the campers (the organ belonging to the institution for which the campers were working). Actually, the one preparing breakfast -- and this responsibility was shared by all the members -- awoke fifteen minutes before the others. Breakfast was not a complicated meal, but one of oatmeal oftentimes without sugar, three slices of bread, and usually tea.

A period of silent meditation lasting ten minutes was observed each morning after breakfast by those who wished to attend. This practice, found helpful in most American camps to get perspective and to cultivate the spirit of unity and reconciliation, was introduced in many European camps and was generally found to be integrating without jeopardizing the important principle of neutrality in religious beliefs stressed by S.C.I.

By seven o'clock the campers were on the project. Three women members of the group remained behind to do the housework, which included the laundry for the entire camp, and to prepare the noon and evening meals and the mid-morning and mid-afternoon "snacks." The "head sister," the one who did the food purchasing for the camp, was usually one of the three who remained "at home" while the two others changed from day to day.

On the project itself, the campers were enlarging a sportsfield for a children's institution. The work was difficult, but the campers were happy in doing something of real significance, an important factor in choosing a project. While working, the campers would sing or talk further about some topic discussed the night before. How

much singing and talking the volunteers should do while working was one of the problems met by this group. The campers were never denied these privileges while working, but the attitudes of a few of the volunteers who felt that the work was all-important created a bit of tension and ill-feeling in camp. Most of the campers did feel that work should be important, but not to the extent of preventing sound human relations to develop.

Although there was no direct work done with the young boys of the institution, the boys did join the campers in the work project. Their participation was welcomed and encouraged, but the campers had to be careful not to give them too much attention and thus neglect the actual work to be done.

The enlarging of the playground was not an impossible task, and there was more than enough work for all. However, there were times when the group's work was delayed or wasted due to the lack of sound technical pre-arrangement in undertaking the project and also to the lack of actual technical advice on the spot. Occasionally, a feeling of frustration was sensed in the group when the campers were doing a particular job, but were not given adequate explanation of why it was necessary to do and its relation to the work project as a whole.

During the middle of the morning, about ten o'clock, there was a ten minute break and sandwiches were served to the campers together with tea or buttermilk. The campers continued their work until twelve noon, at which time they walked back to their living quarters about a half mile away. This short walk was one of the bright spots in camp life, for the campers soon became friendly with a number of the residents who lived along the way and who first viewed the campers with much curiosity and bewilderment.

The noon meal served at 12:30 always consisted of potatoes with gravy, supplemented with a meager serving of one vegetable, and meat whenever it was available, which was not very often. The time from one to two was for rest.

Work was resumed at two o'clock and continued on until five with the usual break of ten minutes around 3:30. Almost always before supper, the organ could be heard and a few of the ever energetic campers singing away. The evening meal was eaten at six o'clock. At this meal, five slices of bread were served to each person together with soup, usually, sometimes oatmeal or beans or potato salad, and always tea. It was only on rare occasions that coffee was served. While the dirty dishes of the morning and noon meals were taken care of by the "kitchen crew," the dishes in the evening were done by a voluntary crew.

Evening programs were scheduled during the week. Wednesday nights were usually kept free for the campers, while Tuesday, Thursday and Friday nights the group participated in planned discussions on topics ranging from the problems of German youth, colonization problems, national patterns and customs, the Marshall Plan, American capitalism and Russian communism, to religion, pacifism and international work camps.

Sometimes in the place of these planned discussions, various people from the institution itself and from the community were invited to speak to the group, and occasionally an evening was devoted to some recreational group activity. However, the actual recreational period came during the week ends after Saturday lunch, the morning always being spent working on the project. On Sunday, the entire group often went on picnics or all-day excursions to sightsee, to visit quaint fishing villages, museums or historical places. Saturday nights were spent singing, dancing,

walking, attending concerts and sometimes the cinema.

Monday evenings were set aside for "house meetings," at which time ideas and suggestions of the campers were considered and problems regarding camp life were discussed. These included anything from food problems, work hours, adequate sleeping hours, how much free time one should have, what to do with late risers, too much noise during sleeping hours, leadership problems and other general personnel difficulties to general planning of the educational program and what plans should be made for week end trips.

Two of the more basic questions, those of religious and national attitudes, which faced the group and which created a certain amount of tension at first, actually did much to strengthen the spiritual and emotional growth of the individual campers in the final analysis. With nationalities in camp representing former "enemy" countries, the campers were aware of existing tensions and tried very hard to overcome these conflicts and attitudes. The generality which says that such barriers can be erased became a reality to this work camp group, and a great thing was achieved when everyone finally accepted one another as individuals and as equals.

Most of the campers were opposed to religion in its formal doctrinal sense, but the fact that many were interested in discussing this topic, that questions were being raised about it, that many were searching for a faith which could be applied to their own lives, was evidence that many of the volunteers were experiencing a far greater spiritual growth than could be detected on the surface and on the group level.

The ruggedness of the work, the simplicity of the meals, the variations in food and other customs, the lack of privacy and other deprivations often intensify these problems, but the combination of working together for the welfare of others in need and of meditation together to point up the volunteers' highest objectives has often achieved a most unusual degree of intimate comradeship and group morale-- and in the end there has often been almost universal enthusiasm.

A Finnish camper, for example, wrote: "He who has once experienced happiness always wants to lead others to happiness. He will share his most precious treasures. This I have seen and felt in work camps."

And a German said: "To know that I belong to a world wide camp family, working together toward the same end, the realization of love on earth, gives me strength and courage to go on."

That someone does care and that suffering can be shared and understood is also felt very keenly by the many countries which benefit from the work done by the campers. The personal contacts established between the work campers and the community have far greater significance and value than any amount of efficient work which could be done by bulldozers. A Finnish farmer wrote: "Now, I am writing some words to you good work campers. At first I want to thank you for helping us in many kinds of important work. You have voluntarily come here to help us from different countries and have understood our needs -- how we have had to build everything anew, fields as well as houses. I want also to thank all who have arranged these camps. We shall have many good memories of you. When we visit the places where you have been working we will think of you. You have been like the migratory bird. You came in the spring, stayed here for the summer working with us, and now that the autumn has come you leave us. You go back to your own countries and to your own work and

we feel very sad at your leaving. May God bless you all, both on your journey and at your home."

Along with the contribution of work and spirit to communities served by work camps, there is a contribution to the work campers themselves.

Volunteers come to work camps with varying degrees of self-centeredness, indifference, discouragement, and cynicism. The educational task is to expose these campers to the conditions of others, to their needs and problems so that their emotional reaction is positive, sympathetic, constructive, and then to channel that emotion into vigorous and deeply satisfying work so that nothing less than a lifetime of similar devotion to the welfare of others can give comparable fulfillment.

What is experienced by an individual during his period of service in a work camp can best be expressed in the words of one of the volunteers who participated in a Finnish work camp in the summer of 1949:

"This experience was to have a definite beginning and an end, clean cut, given finality by renewed geographical separation. Well, the undertaking had a beginning all right, but the end is not yet in sight, and for me, probably never will be.... I am not quite the same person who left this country more than four months ago. I can't account for just what happened in words, but it seems vital to indicate the tremendous personal impact of the venture, particularly since this feeling was by no means confined to me but was widespread among the foreign volunteers. I am concerned with why after twenty years of a rather varied and engrossing life, after associations with groups engaged in many sorts of activities, in many areas of human endeavor, I suddenly should be so affected by the life of one small and transitory group in the forests of northern Finland.

"The simple life, devoid of irrelevancies, tended to concentrate attention on important matters, which if not profound questions of an intellectual or spiritual nature, were the vital down-to-earth problems of human relationships. What gave the experience so much meaning was its all-absorbing quality. The individual was totally immersed, completely engulfed in a vivid, stimulating life which often satisfied him physically, spiritually, morally, intellectually, and emotionally. One's contacts with other campers were sometimes so real, so trenchant and touching, cutting through the swathe of superficiality, of flimsy outer mechanisms induced by a faulty society, and piercing through to the inner person, clean, vibrant, and responsive, that barriers of background and nationality were as naught. It was like finding a second home, like taking root in the Finnish soil, almost in a way like being born again. And all this was so only because of the vitally close relationship between head and hand and heart, between ideal and practice. We were not at cross purposes. We were not unconcerned, uninvolved. We were as one."

In spite of this sort of enthusiasm and its obvious validity, the movement of "small international groups, working, living and learning together" remains small.

Obviously, this program has remained small, infinitesimally small, like a collection of tiny candles scattered in an ocean of darkness.

Perhaps it will always remain so, shedding light brighter and brighter on what could be, even as the darkness deepens. If this does prove to be the case it will be primarily due to the lack of adequate financing.

In most European camps the actual maintenance of the volunteers as well as all building materials and work supervision has been provided by a local agency (a hospital, or school board, or city government), so that the campers have only had to finance their own travel and the sponsoring work camp organization has only to provide the staff, to make arrangements to get out publicity, and to recruit the volunteers. Even so, it has been very difficult for the work camp agencies to raise adequate funds from individual contributors to meet their most necessary expenses.

Surely with adequate funds to organize and plan, the number of volunteers and the number of camps could be multiplied and a tremendously significant contribution to the spiritual climate of the world could be made.

Perhaps the number of locations would be exhausted where local agencies are willing to pay for building materials and maintenance. This has been found to be the case in America so that in almost all the camps in the United States the volunteers have had to contribute the cost of their maintenance or other contributions have had to be found outside the local community. This has seriously limited the number of volunteers available and to a large extent has restricted them to the relatively privileged student minority, in spite of scholarships made available.

Meanwhile in certain Eastern European countries, governments have enrolled hundreds of thousands of volunteers ready to work without pay on projects financed by the government.

Unless the problem of finance is adequately met by private agencies or by governments or by both, cooperating through UNESCO, the work camp movement will remain little more than a significant gesture, a tangible proof of what could be if only a fraction of the energy now put into preparation for war would be put into the waging of peace.

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