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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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The very diversity of the various AFSC projects in Germany and Austria helps to illustrate one of the basic purposes of our work: creative action with and for our fellow man, in order to relieve destructive tensions between individuals, groups or nations, and thereby contribute to the building of more peaceful relations between people. Refugee services, neighborhood center programs, student centers, clothing distributions, summer work camps, school affiliations -- all are ways of indicating by deed this fundamental faith and purpose. The reports coming from our field workers continue to illustrate this diversity.

Talk with Albert Schweitzer

Amiya Chakravarty, an Indian professor and philosopher, has recently been visiting with the AFSC units. Bob Reuman reports one of the high points of this trip:

"Then we drove into France and up to Gunsback, near Colmar, the home of Albert Schweitzer and where he is staying this summer until returning to Lambarene in the fall. This was a marvelous visit and one which none of us will forget. At 76 Schweitzer is as dynamic, forceful and vigorous as are few men at 30 or 40. We were received very cordially and treated with genuine hospitality and kindness. Although we arrived late, and stayed unforgiveably later, perhaps causing him to miss his supper, he was the soul of courtesy itself. While someone else was speaking he would sit in an attitude of intense concentration, chin resting on his hand, his tangled lion's mane thrusting up and out over his face, and then with precision and force he enunciated his response. He spoke of Geist (spirit and vision) as being that which the world needs, even to the exclusion of organization. 'Organization without Geist is like a locomotive without fire.' 'Geist can get along without Organization, but Organization cannot dispense with Geist.' Man must achieve this spirit within him, then it will radiate forth and illumine the world. Only in this way can the world be saved.

"He spoke on the Apostle Paul as the world's greatest thinker, a man widely misunderstood, even by Gandhi, and how, to understand Paul, it is not enough to read the letters 20 or 30 times -- one must study and live with them. He showed great interest in Gandhi, Nehru and Tagore and several times repeated with a chuckle while a smile lighted up the deep lines of his face; 'I have a very hard life, but Nehru's is more difficult.' Then later he ruffled his hair and said, 'Einstein and I are the same on top, but inside there is a difference. He has much greater knowledge.'

"He recalled having visited the Quaker Studentenhaus in Freiburg and asked about our work. Throughout the visit he was most cordial, and invited us to come back another time. Like certain other great men who have a thousand things to do, whose time is always in demand, he gave the impression of serenity and quiet, completely unhurried, as if he would be delighted to give an hour, or a day, of his time to anyone who asked. Recognizing, however, how easy it was to take advantage of him, we finally left at 7:30 in the evening."

Farm Loans for Refugees

One of the more direct services being developed in Austria is a farm loan project for Volksdeutsche refugees. This has been under way for some time, but has now "moved into high gear."

This program we feel to be adapted to this present period. The immediate chaos following the war has now clearly passed. Finding a self-respecting and dignified way of life is often a much longer task, particularly for those who lost everything and were cast from their homelands. In our present efforts we have tried to provide services which will help in this task of rebuilding a shattered society. In this particular program we feel we have found a way of helping to integrate the Volksdeutsche refugees into the everyday economic and social life of Austria.

Loans will be granted from a fund which will become revolving. They will be comparatively small in size with no interest for the first two years. After this there will be a gradually increasing rate of interest during the next few years. These and other details have been worked out carefully with the Landwirtschaftskammer (rather like our Farm Bureau) and other Austrian agencies. Because the people whom we will be helping have lost practically everything, it is impossible for them to obtain commercial loans. The individual contracts will, of course, vary according to the individual cases.

Here are some notes from Spencer Coxe's report:

"Since the project was first decided upon, a number of applications had accumulated (exclusive of the one family to whom we made a loan early in the spring). In order to come to some decision on the pending applications, two of us spent the best part of a week touring Oberoesterreich. First we had a series of conferences in Linz (especially with the Landwirtschaftskammer) to lay down the general principles and then we set off to visit the families. Nothing I have done in Austria to date has given me more satisfaction than this week.

"I shan't bother to report in detail at the moment on each family we visited. But I must report on the applicants as a group. Without exception they impressed us as admirable people. Most of them were modest in their demands, and expressed on principle a dislike of borrowing. They said they wished to borrow as little as possible and repay as quickly as possible. At least two people seemed to us to be asking considerably less than they needed to make ends meet, and we had to urge them to increase their requests. All the people struck us as extremely hard working. Two men work in a factory all day, and build their own houses in the evening.

"All the families were, of course, Volksdeutsche, but within this general category were quite a varied lot. There were Protestants and Catholics, Sudendentutsche from Czechoslovakia, Siebenburgsachsen from Rumania, and Donauschwaben from Jugoslavia. A good many of them had been relatively well-off in their homelands; possessing large farms. We discovered that each applicant had a different need, and that few of the needs were exactly what we had imagined when we originally thought up the project. For example, some families have already rented a farm but have no capital for another incubator so that they can raise geese too, and also for fowl-houses where they can raise the birds they breed. Another man whose specialty is rose-growing needs 2,000 schillings to bore a well for his rose-farm. (The pipe will be our security.) Someone else wants help in finishing a house on a small piece of ground so that he and his family (eight people) can move out of a two-room basement dwelling and go into vegetable gardening. Another man who owns land is in difficulty in paying off his debt to the man from whom he bought it. Someone else wants our help in finding a piece of land to rent.

"One of the most rewarding visits we made was to the family to whom we made a loan in the spring. We found them already settled into their new barrack-dwelling which they erected in the country with our help. A vegetable and flower garden is already under way, and, more important, the pig breeding, on which they will rely for supplementary income is now a going concern. Counting all the in-laws, about 15 people have thus been able to move out of a dismal and depressing refugee camp where they had already spent far too many years. This was made possible by our loan of 10,000 schillings, half of which will be repaid on 1 January. The family is extremely happy and most grateful for our help, and you can imagine what a satisfaction it was to see the tangible results, i.e. pigs, and a dwelling, of our first loan.

"In diverse ways we are enabling some to change from industry or unemployment into agricultural pursuits, we are rescuing others from severe financial difficulties which threaten to drive them from the land, we will be assisting others to move from a very marginal farm existence into an assured livelihood which will enable their children to continue farming rather than move into the cities. In most cases (particularly the fowl-breeding family) we are, in a small way, helping to improve Austria's agriculture by bringing into it skilled and progressive farmers."

Berlin - Focal Point of Tension

The tensions of the world today seem to be spelled out in capital letters today. One of the reports of last spring suggests the almost overdramatic situation which continues today:

"In order to understand the Mittelhof and its activities, it is necessary to have as clear a picture as possible of the background against which our daily activities in the house are played.

"First comes the increasingly present East-West question. Mittelhof lives and has its being in a city which epitomises more than any other

the continual underlying struggle of our age between the value of the individual as opposed to that of the mass. In other countries the struggle is still an obscure heaving beneath the surface of everyday life or is sharpened to the point of armed warfare which cloaks the basic oppositions in national antagonisms; in Berlin the two philosophies stand on two sides of a wall which still has a few gateways open in it through which both sides can still have contact and attempts at understanding. Here in Berlin the drama which for many other countries is still a struggle between abstracts tied up in neat parcels of definitions -- Capitalism v. Communism, Totalitarianism v. Democracy, Russia v. America -- is enacted each day in the lives of men and women and this is the constant background of Mittelhof....

"Mittelhof still has, however, a positive part to play in being a meeting-ground for East and West. Here opinions and viewpoints can be clarified. Here we in the West can be brought to see more vividly what endless problems of conscience wreck the thinking of many individuals: here we have our loophole to the East and East to us. Here a pastor from the East, for instance, can depict the position of the Protestant Church and its problems. The happy unusualness of our position was strikingly demonstrated during an international conference which was held here under the leadership of Swiss and German psychologists and educationalists on 'the psychology of child victims of the war.' Amongst the many psychologists, psychiatrists, educators and social workers invited to attend were a good number from the East Sector who had received permission to have time off to come.

"In all except our children's groups we have participants from both sectors and sometimes from the East zone. This is especially the case in the youth groups. In the Claude Shotts discussion group, for instance (an English discussion group), are students from the Free University and the Humboldt University. One of our staff members lives in the East Sector and does a good deal of her social welfare work there. Our rest-home guests are all from the East zone.

"How long we can remain a neutral meeting ground is difficult to estimate, for tensions and pressure increase continually."

We Move

The Mittelhof and its spirit has become an AFSC institution but the roof overhead has been in different places. This spring the Mittelhof moved for the third time to what will probably be fairly permanent quarters in Koenigstrasse in Zehlendorf. As to be expected, the moving meant special trials and tribulations. But with it came some special joys as well:

"... And so on. But moving day came on March 19th and by 4 p.m. the furniture had been brought and we had received our first visit of greeting with a bouquet and a song from a group of abnormal children who live in a home nearby whose Director is an old friend of Mittelhof. Just as they finished the removal men carried in the piano; one of them sat down at the keyboard and played a waltz and we all, staff, visiting children and furniture men whirled round the room. Mittelhof thus inaugurated its large meeting room.

"One thing became very clear through this difficult period -- that our stresses came from outward circumstances and not from inward strains in the house. Everyone still on two legs worked with a will and gave unsparingly of extra time.

"Without the wholehearted participation of so many of the youth before and since the move, the house would never have been made so attractive and liveable so quickly. Since the beginning of March we have had week-end work camps with varying numbers, generally around 15 but once reaching a peak of 45 plus staff. They have scraped, washed and painted walls, scrubbed floors, raked dead leaves off the large expanse of grass, carried, fetched, delved and dug, doing the dull jobs as wholeheartedly as the ones which were fun."

In a new environment, the program work will take a different emphasis or reach new people, but many of the basic services will remain the same. For example, the children's work:

"We discussed with the Youth Office here in Zehlendorf how best we could help the children here and it was decided to resume the type of program we carried on in Nikolassee, i.e. groups of children coming for rest and recuperation for a month at a time. The city will provide a daily mid-day meal and from our stocks we can give snacks. The first group is of school-age children and the later ones will be groups of 30 children from 3-5. The accommodation in the new house is charming.

"The Children's U.N. started by Alice Shaffer is going to meet regularly again and the first meeting is lucky enough to have as speaker Elisabeth Rotten from Switzerland."

In the British Zone

In a report from the British Zone, where AFSC and the British Friends Service Council have cooperated in several programs, comes a story of material being put to a dual use. Clothes are being made and self-respect is being regained.

"Refugee Sewing Room at Eichendorff-Siedlung. At a Parent's Day - a very jolly affair, which was also made the occasion for a thank-offering to the Quakers for their unfailing help and support, it was stated that it had been possible to distribute 1,000 garments made or remade in the sewing room. This is quite a creditable effort; but to me the important thing has been the marked change in the women who have taken an active part in the work. The recognition they have gained by their service to the community has given them confidence in their own ability, so that they are now prepared to take responsibility, which they were really frightened to do before.

"That alone has enabled us to extend the scope of the sewing room, by taking in unemployed girls to teach them sewing -- another very valuable outcome of the scheme. Though because of the limited number of machines only a few girls could be taken on, they are so keen and work so hard that the output of the sewing room has been considerably increased. A great incentive to work, of course, has been the

new material AFSC have so generously contributed, and which is largely responsible for the successful development of the sewing rooms."

Problems Unsolved

One of the problems about which we have been and are acutely aware is that of the expellee or refugee. Many German agencies, public and private, are making concerted efforts to help integrate these people into the life of Western Germany. Foreign agencies (including AFSC) have also helped in numerous small ways. When one looks at the size of this influx of people, it is impressive to realize how much has been done, how many have themselves been able to find jobs, make a home in a crowded room of an apartment building. But there are still the camps. Greater efforts have to be and are being made to help Germany get over the humps of this special problem.

We have kept close to this problem through our work in Oldenburg. At the present time we are working out plans for increased services and a greater emphasis in our work on this problem of refugee integration.

The depth of the problem is illustrated in a report from an English worker who visited some camps where it has not been possible to make special efforts to improve conditions:

"Just as the exterior of the camps is depressingly similar wherever one goes, so is the pattern of life in the camps everywhere alike. One finds in each camp, a camp-leader, usually employed by the Local Authorities. His duties are seldom concerned with anything beyond supervising the maintenance of the living conditions of the dwellings. There is extraordinarily little evidence of any corporate feeling or even neighbourliness. I looked in vain in most camps for a common recreation room; in that respect the communal laundry, an outhouse fitted with large tubs and a drain, seemed all that was offered to promote either communal activity or recreation.

"I talked with innumerable people in the camps I visited. What about? It is no kindness to ask about their past for it only quickens the sore memory of all they have lost. Nor is it really helpful to pry far into their present material difficulties; in most cases the local authorities are doing what they can, if very grudgingly. Nor is it wise to talk about the future, even if one has the courage to speculate on the evergrowing threat of war. About what, then, does one talk? About anything, so I found, that could be grasped as a normal creative activity, however minute. The gardens, what grew best? What sort of manure was needed? About the children, what they were learning at school? What games they played? About any tiny sign in the room of an interest beyond food and shelter, a picture, a book, a sewing machine. How fatuous that all sounds! And yet is done in a frantic impulse to try to prevent these unfortunate people from deciding that life altogether is fatuous and meaningless. The miracle is that even in a short visit one could sense here and there a stirring of response -- enough to send one home racking one's mind for the necessary imagination and vision to point a way in which we can offer real help."

Though it is small in scope, it was heartening to read her comments on the Oldenburg project:

"This being my frame of mind when I went to Oldenburg, you can imagine with what particular interest I went round with Elsie Gainham to see the work that AFSC is doing in some of the outlying camps in the Oldenburg district. At once I felt the extraordinarily invigorating effect of being in direct touch with creative action. The sight of these busy Sewing rooms -- the good machines, the bright new materials, the bales of knitting wool acted like a tonic. (And if this was the effect on me, what must it be like for the refugee?) Better still was it to come upon groups of men busy on the actual work of building a Community Room, or to join in a social evening in one such room already finished and equipped with an inviting selection of games, all well used. Best of all to talk with the people and find the pride they took in the work that was being done. Of course there were heaps of difficulties -- the Kindergarten mistress shook her grey head over the unruly wildness of the children. Here work was delayed through an uncooperative camp leader, there it was abused by a domineering clique in the camps.

"But such troubles were insignificant in the face of the general success of the projects seen in the life of the camp, and the welcoming smiles which one saw on so many faces when the Quaker car arrived were unmistakably genuine. Elsie and Paul are splendid at this job and seem able to infect the people with some of their own energy and conviction -- they also seem able to remember the names, faces, personal histories and characteristics of a bewildering number of the refugees. Going round with Elsie enabled one to step right into these people's lives -- how different from the files and statistics of the Fluchtlingsamt."

Children Reflect the Life Around Them

One of the most welcome volunteer workers in the Frankfurt Neighborhood Center has been Henrietta Read, wife of James Read, who has been conducting an art class for children. They use simple paints on old newspapers for their work. Recently these youngsters held an exhibit. About 50 people, including city education and welfare officials, as well as Mrs. McCloy, attended.

"The City Councilor for Youth Problems found one set of pictures that interested him greatly. They were two pictures on the theme, 'My Family.' Both were painted by nine-year-old girls. The one in strong outline and bold colors showed a family standing together with about three children. The other with uncertain strokes and weak colors showed five children, all very small and insignificant, and a big black air raid shelter looming in the background, where this family lived. Recently a voluntary group of workers from the Nachbarschaftsheim worked hard and long and finally built a new home for the 'Bunker' family. This whole contrast of symbols was a real experience for Stadtrat Prestel, who told the whole story to Mrs. McCloy."

From Ludwigshafen comes also a thoughtful story of children:

"In Praise of Beauty. Most of us love it, but what it is, and how it is achieved, are matters of considerable difference of opinion. One group, listening to Jazz rhythms in a room the walls of which are decorated with Klee prints, feel that they have one answer. The adults who meet weekly to listen to classical music, the Photo Group members with cameras in hand, the other young people who do folk dances of their own and other countries, the singers of the Negro Spirituals, find each a different kind of beauty. Children seem to have an instinctive appreciation of the beautiful. Among other ways, this was brought to our attention one Saturday afternoon, when their group being over, eight little girls of Albrecht Turk's groups came pleading for work to do -- floors to scrub, dishes to wash -- anything. (I'm sure their mothers would have been shocked!) The floors having been scrubbed and the dishes washed already, we set them to work dusting library books. That job over, they still wanted work. Watering the flowers, which grow riotously along our three entrances, was the next job. The energy of the children was still unexpended. Betty, whose ideas were running low, suggested that each one pick a bouquet to take home. The answer was unanimous. No indeed, they wouldn't pick those flowers -- they looked too pretty just where they were. So, we finished off the afternoon with a cocoa party. It struck me, however, as interesting, that with probably 200 children on the premises every week, and absolutely no adult prohibitions against flower-picking, the flowers remain, protected by the children's appreciation of them."

Tribute

In this diverse program there are some services that can be judged and evaluated according to so many people clothed, so many children at a nursery school per week, so many pounds of clothing shipped per month. There are other aspects -- work with students and young people, conference center programs, etc., which are not so easily measured. We believe and feel that they are equally important. It was therefore particularly gratifying to receive a letter from a Viennese woman recently arrived in the United States:

"My daughter belonged to the Quaker Youth in Vienna for some years. She loved the evenings at the Quaker house. I have to thank you for the wonderful good you have done in the European countries. Not only by giving food and clothes, I mean the spirit you gave back to our young ones. They were lost after the war, everywhere seemed to be nothing but hate -- then your American Friends Service Committee came and took pity on the youngsters. You gave back faith, hope and love to them and I just want to thank you for that with all my heart!"