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During late summer and fall Jessie Poesch, assistant area director for the work in Germany and Austria, visited most of the AFSC projects there. Following is a condensed report of some of her impressions:

Ruins, Rebuilding and Refugees

Ruins, still standing and gaunt, were the first things that struck my eye when my train moved into Germany. Perhaps it was because I had heard so much about recovery that these struck me more sharply, but it was something of a surprise to realize again how ever-present the ruins are.

People are working terribly hard, rebuilding, recreating industry, starting new businesses, etc. One young lawyer in Wuppertal said, "We've come over a mountain in the last three years. But now things have to move more slowly. We can't keep up this pace."

There has, of course, been a great deal of recovery. The increasing normality of everyday life and the comparative degree of recovery in many phases of life makes the lot of some of the refugees, expellees, unemployed and bunker dwellers all the harder to see and to take. The Oldenburg area is one of several regions that fairly bristle with refugee camps. The AFSC has a small unit working among the people in seven of these camps.

We speak often of the desolateness of these camps. But you really feel how desolate they are when you drive to them. The land is flat; the farm houses and farm villages seem few and far between. Finally you turn off onto a narrow, sandy little road and soon come upon a collection of barracks and shabby huts amidst a scraggly pine forest. This is the camp.

Here you can't feel that much real recovery has taken place. I suppose conditions are better than they were in '46 and '47, but there seems to be a terrible flatness about the life in the camps -- an out-of-touchness with the world.

Many of the barracks where the folks live are amazingly clean and neat, even though there are often three to five people living in a single room. I guess Germans are famous for their love of flowers. Again and again I was struck by the beauty of the gay gardens in front of their miserable shacks

In governmental circles numerous sorts of schemes of assistance are being proposed. But the plans and programs and schemes for the solution

take a long time to permeate all the way down to the level of the individual refugee in a camp. They feel they are living in places very near the end of the world.

The work of our AFSC unit in Oldenburg is on an individual level. By regularly visiting and working in these camps our workers have come to know the people well and to share with them the ups and downs of their everyday life. We were welcome in all the "homes." One woman showed us with great pride the kitchen cabinet her husband had made out of some odd bits of old furniture they had acquired. A mother asked for advice about an apprentice home where her son might be going. Everywhere folks showed with pride some of the garments which they had made with textiles and materials given by AFSC. In another they excitedly told us of the expected visit of some of the local refugee officials -- how could they best present their problems? One camp was pretty completely upset by the suicide of a young mother.

One of the most exciting things to see was the little "factory" we've helped to set up in Burlagsberg. Just as my senses were getting dulled to bleak surroundings, crowded rooms, idle people, etc. we visited this small beehive of activity. Here were about 15 to 20 women, all in the usual German working smocks, working away in the two sunny Quonset huts.

It was equally fun to see the kindergarten at Burlagsberg. This too, came into being pretty much because of initial encouragement from our unit. The camp members tackled the job and now there is a reasonable well-equipped Quonset-hut kindergarten. The little children come in the morning, the older children in the afternoon. It seems a rare, good thing for the children and their parents.

#### Day-to-Day Face-to-Face Democracy

In the course of my trip I visited every one of the AFSC-sponsored neighborhood centers in Germany. One thing, I was rather surprised to discover how brimful of people they are most of the time. This may sound odd, coming from someone who has been close to the administrative side of these projects.

The communities and neighborhoods are surprisingly eager for all sorts of special small group activities. There are gymnastic classes, music groups, open door programs for young men, kindergartens, kinder- horte, meetings of social workers, etc. The night I was in Ludwigshafen two groups had to amalgamate because the walls were so thin they could hear each other anyhow -- and there wasn't another spare room in the place!

If you call a community normal where someone is 6,000th on a waiting list for a room, then it is correct to say that the programs are geared to the needs of more or less normal communities. Practically all the areas where we are working have terrific housing problems. In Frankfurt, for example, one of the women I talked to lives with her husband and 16-year-old daughter in a part of a room -- it is separated from other inhabitants by a blanket. Conditions in the bunker near the Center in Wuppertal are quite unbelievable. Many of the programs for the young people and the children help to meet some of the problems of overcrowding by providing wholesome

recreational opportunities. Other programs meet other special needs -- such as the child guidance clinic in Wuppertal, etc.

The Centers are also somewhat unique in the opportunity they provide for reaching across some of the rigid lines in the structure of German society. They are significant as experiments in day-to-day face-to-face democracy. This is so because of a democratic structure and because of the atmosphere of democratic relations -- honest respect and concern for individual human beings -- which is striven for in all the Centers. I was especially interested to be shown an unsolicited report from one of our German co-workers, in which it was said:

"In the years of their existence, the aim of the Centers has been to develop neighborly relationships as the background for good citizenship. People visiting and belonging to the Centers have experienced the value of something new being done there. That these projects are open to their suggestions and to their participation as well as to their criticism has promoted the feeling that they can have a part in creating a different community life."

Another significant aspect of the centers is that they have indeed become thoroughly cooperative projects between AFSC and the German committees who share in the responsibility. These have more than a semblance of roots in the communities where they are.

The "growing up" of the centers was rather symbolized for me at the conference in the Mittelhof from September 15th to 21st, in which the seven AFSC-sponsored Centers and five other Centers in Berlin joined together to form a Federation of German Neighborhood Centers (Verband Deutsche Nachbarschaftsheime). Their first cooperative efforts will be on fund-raising. The formation of this federation seems to me to be tangible evidence of the real interest and desire of the various local committees to take on long-term responsibility for community service projects they feel to be valid and meaningful.

#### AFSC in Austria

I never know whether it is so because one reads it so often or not, but there is a rather different atmosphere in Austria. Life seems to move at a more leisurely pace, is more gracious and charming. It was pleasant to be with the unit in Vienna for a week. In Vienna and later in Western Austria I visited more refugee camps. There is a dreadful sameness about them. The variety of the people helps to make them different, but their surface stories follow the same patterns. I particularly remember a dear little lady from Hungary. She spoke not a single, solitary word of German but because she was of German ethnic origin she had been expelled after the war. An old men's quarter in one camp was particularly depressing. So were the rooms of those refugees who live in "Firma Lagers." These are simply rooms or parts of rooms in bombed-out buildings. In 1945 the Volksdeutsche were allowed to live in those nooks and crannies they could find. We practically had to climb the scaffolding to reach the rooms of the two families we visited. They were furnished in the usual makeshift manner. It is ironic to realize that for these refugees rebuilding means losing rather than gaining a roof over the head. One family expected to be ousted within a month. On hearing this, Barbara

Murray, the FSC worker, decided to talk to one of the Austrian authorities she knew who might be able to see that proper housing is found for these people. Here, as in other places, I was struck with what can be a peculiar role of a Quaker worker. By being in close and intimate touch with problem situations they are often able to express concerns in middle and high places which help to eliminate and alleviate these problems. By being concerned about each human being, they are better able to express concern for situations affecting more.

The Youth Committee at Quakerhouse in Vienna were in the midst of a policy discussion on selection of part-time leaders for their groups, and so I spent literally hours sitting in and participating in several of their meetings. The vitality of the group, their vigor in discussion, and the number who participated and shared in the work struck me. Here was as democratic and sincere a group as any made up of U.S. college-age young people. Another important factor that seemed to come out was the feeling on the part of the young people that here was a place not catering to the interests of a specific interest or background group, that students and working young people could come together here. One of the most important aspects of the youth program is the consistent international flavor and the concomitant opportunity to know people. The groups are experimenting with a plan for seeking more leaders from among the international student body in Vienna.

Refugees and their plight are very much on the minds and hearts of the unit in Vienna. The farm loan project is now under way, and I was able to see this first-hand. One farmer we visited had obtained a loan several months ago and proudly showed us the pigs he had bought with the loan. The couple had themselves built two rooms on to their barn for their own living quarters. One felt a sense of the pioneer spirit as they told of their plans. This project is still small and experimental. The funds are being drawn from what is to become a revolving loan fund. If the scheme proves sound it is hoped that it can be expanded and that similar schemes will be adopted by other organizations.

### Work Among the Displaced

Munich and our work in several IRO DP camps was near the end of my visit. During the week I was there three crises were brewing or had brewed. These were crises in the lives of the DP's or Germans whom the unit knows.

First a word about the camps. The living quarters are the same miserable shack-like quarters. Toilets and plumbing (at the end of each long barrack) were first installed last year. The walls are flimsy, the roofs often leak. Heating must be done in little iron stoves. Rooms are crowded. Perhaps they are in such bad shape because most of the occupants have been more or less transient; though a few have actually been in this or other camps for four long years.

What disturbed me so much was to realize that this was the problem, this was the plight of people that has pricked the whole world's conscience and that the whole world had cooperated to help solve. The number of expel-

lees and what happened to them, or the current daily problem of illegal border crossers have never made headlines. Thousands of people have been "processed" (a necessity in this day of restricted movement) and have been helped to find new homes. But for those whose chance didn't come in the first year or so it's been a long wait, and there seems to have developed a kind of meaningless pattern to the day to day existence of the people in the camps.

At present we still have several staff members working in the IRO home for the unaccompanied DP children. In Schleissheim we are responsible for a children's room (there are 900 children in the camp and this is the only place resembling a recreation, activity room or kindergarten) and for a reading room for adults. In addition our two staff members in the Munich office seem to follow through on any number of other "concerns" -- such as practically running an additional library from their office, or making fairly regular visits to other camps in the area.

One crisis situation had to do with the housing situation in the Munich-Pasing area. Many of the German homes here have long been technically under requisition of the U.S. Army. For most of the last four years, however, these have been on a kind of loan to IRO for their staff workers. (The whole thing is an unhappy system.) A major difference between IRO use of requisitioned property and Army use of such property is that during this time IRO has allowed the German owners to remain in their homes, albeit often crowded into two or three back rooms. Now with an increasing number of troops coming into Europe the Army was contemplating retaking these properties. On one of the days I was there, there were reports of a couple of soldiers making a survey of rooms available, amount of space for servants, etc. Rumors were flying wildly that all Germans were to be evacuated from their homes within two weeks to a month. Again AFSC representatives, along with those from several other agencies, expressed a concern about this action. There are first of all the obvious humanitarian considerations -- in so-called peacetime you don't turn someone out of his home without careful thought or good reason. There are also morale and public relations factors to be considered. It is one thing to requisition space immediately after the end of hostilities. It is quite another thing to do this five years after a war, and particularly when a good bit of the occupying powers' energies have been devoted to "re-education" of democratic concepts and respect for individual rights and liberties. Further, if one condones rearmament in Germany (as some agencies sincerely do) or believes that friendship between countries is important for "mutual security" or plain ordinary peaceful relations, then an action such as this is one of those numerous minor irritants that goes against this and makes for hate and distrust between peoples. It seems typical of a kind of rough-shod thoughtlessness of our times.

Often one feels the Quaker worker has a uniquely flexible role. In Austria and in Oldenburg I was especially aware of it. By working in a problem situation we come to know and to share the hardships and joys of a people. Often by being foreign and non-government, yet at least semi-official, we are able to express concerns with greater force, less prejudice and yet with as much sincerity and familiarity with the problem as others more directly involved. Most Quaker workers seem able to be equally at home in castles or in hovels. Sometimes this may mean interceding for a single individual, or helping to call a social cancer to the attention of

responsible authorities, or acting as a mediator in a difficult situation.

These are just a few of the highlights of what was a very busy summer and fall. There are obvious shadows of war -- past and present -- over the whole of Europe. It is hard to say how much the efforts of AFSC are achieving, in even a small way, some of the lofty things we set out to do. This I can say -- it is still a task worthy of our utmost devotion!