

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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FOREIGN SERVICE SECTION

News from Germany and Austria

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Superficially, the various AFSC efforts in Germany and Austria, as well as in other areas, appear to be very diverse. Many projects have developed out of what Quakers call a "concern" about a specific area or to meet a specific need. But threading through all of these efforts one readily discerns a basic relatedness. In the broadest sense this is that ways and means are being sought to serve our fellow-man, to work with and for him in seeking a dignified and creatively peaceful way of life.

In Germany and Austria the projects can be thought of as woven and interwoven with two general purposes: To help people in war-torn countries to reknit the fabric of life, to rebuild, resettle, rehabilitate physically from the suffering and devastation of the war and its aftermath, and equally important, to help them meet the problems of the mind and spirit as they rebuild their society. One recent visitor to Germany commented, "Many people have been 'displaced,' psychologically if not physically. There is a passivity, a fatalism, and a searching.... They seek something that is right for them. Your work represents a strength. Often they can get some needed direction, some support...." The projects themselves may be with farmers in rural Austria, students in Berlin, or village people in a Bavarian community. A look at recent developments in several of these gives one a feel of both the diversity and unity of present services:

Student Aid in Austria.

Work opportunities for students and welfare agencies needing additional staff have been combined in a new student employment project undertaken by the AFSC Austrian unit. By now 161 students, all refugees, have held summer jobs or steady part-time jobs. On all sides we hear from students what a difference this program has made to their studies, examinations have been passed easily and in advance of expectation, due to the fact that time has not been lost in the search for work which is otherwise mostly occasional work and means a constant search for a new job.

A student writes:

"Through the generous help of the American Quakers I was able to complete my studies 3-4 months earlier than I had thought possible. If I had not had this work scholarship from the Quakers I should have had to lose time looking for work during the time I should be studying...."

The employers have been helped to do their job. Letters from them testify to this:

W.C.C. Arbeitslager Liebenau.... "Herr G. has worked very effectively and industriously and helped make it possible that the completion of the refugee building project was speeded up so that some families were able to move into their new homes before the beginning of the winter. We are very sorry he was only able to spend such a short time with us, as his lovable personality was a great asset to our community life."

Verein Guter Nachbar, Salzburg.... "We wish to express our sincere thanks for the three student helpers in our summer program in the Haus der Jugend. The three students proved to be excellent group leaders, conscientious and diligent, and able to win the affection of the children. By putting these first-class helpers at our disposal for two months, the American Quakers have rendered us and the children of Salzburg very valuable service."

An attempt has always been made to fit the work to the studies of the student if possible, and means for many not merely a financial help, but a chance to apply their knowledge, to broaden their interests, to learn something of the problems of their fellow citizens and of the local groups trying to help them. These experiences will, we hope, bear fruit at a later date.

A girl student who has helped a refugee organization and a cultural group says:

"My work which has given me great pleasure, has opened my eyes to various problems. On the one side (Refugee Counselling) I have had an insight into the dire need of the oldest and poorest refugees, and on the other side (Organisation for the Preservation of Traditional Arts and Crafts) I have seen the difficulties, financial and otherwise, which hamper the work of those anxious to keep alive folk music and dance and traditional handicrafts."

This particular project has been made possible by a grant from the Ford Foundation and is a part of a larger program being coordinated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. At present it does not appear that further funds will be forthcoming through this channel. A group of Austrians are becoming interested in continuing a program of this sort. We hope that we may be able to give some support to efforts of this type in the future. A similar project has been undertaken in Germany. Both state and federal governments, as well as the universities, have contributed. In this case the AFSC support was the catalyst that set the program into motion. It is reasonably certain that this student work program will be continued there on its own.

Mittelhof - Practice in Voluntary Association.

An AFSC representative in Berlin writes in retrospect of some of the year's happenings:

"The year politically has been a strange and changing one here. Last winter material conditions in the East worsened with a dull steadiness; food was shorter than it had been for years for a variety of reasons (collectivisation of farming, the flight of peasants to the West, loss of the potato harvest through late harvesting, little winter sowing), the concentration on production of capital goods to the detriment of that of consumer goods showed on the markets, pressure was put on the workers to raise their norms of production, for the first time the Church was harassed, some of its pastors imprisoned on grounds of spreading Western propaganda. The fear which these measures caused and the worsened living conditions was reflected in the flood of refugees to West Berlin which grew at an almost unmanageable rate and reached in March its peak monthly figure of 47,000. The death of Stalin brought world-wide uncertainty as to the course events might take. This uncertainty was mirrored in the East Sector for us by the disappearance overnight of almost all slogans and posters, so that it presented an unusually bare appearance for about six weeks. 'Long live the Great Stalin' was rapidly wiped off walls or pushed away into cupboards. This uncertainty of policy gave way to the announcement in early June of

the 'new course', when the Russians, after trouncing the German Government soundly for their lack of moderation, ordered changes forthwith. Such is the speed of dictatorship, that a couple of days later changes had not only been announced but began to take place; facilities for the travel of East Zoners to the West were announced, a changeover to greater production of consumer goods, West Berliners could once again eat in restaurants in the East Sector, the restrictions on the Church were to be eased. Hardly had we got our breath back from this than one week later came the June 17th rising which turned the eyes of a good half of the world on Berlin. The announcement after it of further changes tended to make people think that these concessions were the result of the rising rather than an intensifying of the 'new course' announced a week before. Without doubt the rising, though it did not primarily cause the changes proved conclusively how necessary changes were if the East German State was to continue to exist at all; people from the East Zone have compared the rising with taking the lid off a boiling pot and this brew had been coming to the boil over a period of months....

"... A positive element of the rising and the days following was the clearcut witness it gave to the power of passive resistance. There was surprisingly little bloodshed for a mass movement of this scale when one considers that arms and even tanks were on the spot. Over and over again stories have come from the Zone of passive resistance to tanks and guns, through men linking arms, for instance, in front of a tank and thus bringing it to a halt or of tanks proceeding slowly through the streets with the crowd making way before them and closing its ranks again after their passage. There are the stories of both Russian soldiers and Volkspolizei who refused to shoot on unarmed crowds and were put to death afterwards for refusing to obey orders. In one town a group of workers broke into the headquarters of an official Youth organization in order to destroy the arms they knew were kept there; there was little destruction of factories or machinery, no instance of a crowd running amok. Violence was used to break into prisons and free the inmates and there were occasional individual outbreaks; otherwise non-violence was the unbidden order of the day.

"For Once Giving and Not Receiving." - "The newest development in our work this year was work with refugees, of whom there are a great number in camps in this area, Zehlendorf. We have groups of refugee women who come here for knitting and sewing groups and one group meets in a camp. We have tried to help the women to think a little beyond themselves and their own plight and succeeded in having two groups decide they would give away a half of the things they had knitted to Berlin mothers and children. We had a very happy afternoon here when the refugee women acted as hostesses to the mothers and children who were to receive the knitted things and were glad to be for once in the position of giving and not receiving.

"A further service has been to use our three guest rooms in the children's house as a place to which we could invite married couples to stay for a week in comparative peace and quietness away from the 'mass feeling' of camp life. These refugees are selected by the camp welfare officers as being especially oppressed by the lack of privacy. These guests share a little in the life of Mittelhof, we eat together at mid-day, many of them like to share in our Meeting for Worship in the mornings and they come to the Open Lecture evenings. Some of them have also shared in our Advent festivities. This is all pitifully little in the face of the tens of thousands of refugees who are here and who have so little future.

"In the summer we carried out a full program of rest and recuperation for two groups of people; from April to October tired mothers came for three-weekly periods,

amongst them two groups of deaf and dumb mothers and one group of voluntary helpers from other Centers like ours. At the same time we had two two-month periods of rest and recuperation for fifteen small children between three and five. (Luckily our grounds are large enough to keep these two sorts of groups at a respectful distance from each other). A new venture was a rest and recuperation week for some of our own group children who could not leave Berlin in the holiday periods. This was suggested by the children themselves and was so successful that next summer we plan to have two such periods.

"Another suggestion by the children came in the summer when we told them something of Mittelhof's financial situation. They suggested raising some money by holding a Christmas bazaar which would sell things they would make. This we did last Sunday and it was an enormous success, not only in bringing in over 500 DMs but in the way in which it brought all the children together through joining in a common project, and also brought together all sorts of people who are connected in some way with Mittelhof. We had booths out in the courtyard, a barrel organ, (after the youngster whose job it was to play it got tired arms, he hit on a bright idea and let the other children play it in turn for a few minutes if they paid 10 Pfennigs for the privilege), and a coffee room with home made cookies and home grown waitresses and a fifteen year old playing 'light music' for $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours, a whole repertoire of waltzes and dances and songs, music which, as he put it neatly, people would hear but wouldn't listen to! All kinds of people came, from our postman (a great friend, who comes into the hall and says 'only two for Betty to-day, one for Bill, and a few printed things') to the heating engineer who looks after our heating repairs, members of the Board of Directors, visitors to our Open Evenings, parents of course, and a swarm of children and even a few passers-by from the street."

The Mittelhof is one of the AFSC sponsored neighborhood centers. These centers merit our continued aid through persons and through funds. They offer an opportunity for growth in self-reliance and inner direction in a nation that has been weighed down with authoritarianism and outer direction; they provide unique opportunities for practice in voluntary association which is both non-political and inter-denominational. They are becoming spontaneous centers of community organization to meet wider community need, a form of social response typical in America but relatively new in Germany. Because it is so near and so familiar to us, we easily forget that the heartbeat of democracy is voluntary association. In these, a healthy and virile democracy is being nourished.

Self-Respect Fanned Alive - Oldenburg Refugee Unit.

Placement of camp dwellers in jobs is the task now being undertaken by AFSC's Oldenburg unit. What with new refugees arriving every month the German government resettlement program has been seriously retarded and officials are faced with the problem of trying to place the new refugees in some kind of adequate housing and jobs, as well as to continue to help resettle those refugees who were the "first generation" of refugees arriving in Western Germany in '45 and '46. In many of this latter group hope has dulled. Having lost all and having had little to live on and none to get started anew, they sometimes cling to the few vestiges of security that an unattractive and isolated camp gives.

Last fall the unit inserted a series of want-ads in the name of AFSC and with a description of the qualifications of specific refugees. We have found that some employers will, upon our assurance as to the hazards as well as the possibilities of a person, employ a refugee who could not previously get work. Even with a job

offered the refugees are sometimes hesitant of making a move -- they have been hurt and disappointed too often. They have heard about the misfortune of many resettled refugee families in industrial areas whose family life has crumbled under urban crowding and pressure after years of camp. But hope can be revived. In one camp where nothing but apathy greeted our first efforts to resettle whole families, 80 men have now enrolled for this opportunity and have expressed a desire to leave the camp if we can help them find a job and a home. At present our pattern of trying to find homes or living places as well as jobs is comparatively unique. In some cases we may make short-term loans so that families may make down payments on living quarters. An excerpt from a field report gives some feel of the new developments:

"Herr K, a man with great human and social understanding, has taken four of our most difficult boys into his plant. The tremendous importance of this for our boys and their families is illustrated by the remarks of the father of one of the boys to whom I talked a week ago: 'Greetings from Gerhard. He is very fine and likes it very much there. He has already sent us \$40. And he said to me: be confident, father, you will also find work there. Then we will all work together and I'll help you pay the debts, and then we can all start from the beginning.' The father was quite moved when he told me this. Then he added entreatingly, 'You also believe don't you, that some day we will find work?' ... Herr N. of the Ladigenheim gave us a whole day. A new furnace is being built and he thinks he can give employment to about 15 men from Oldenburg. He would take care of finding homes for the families It is almost impossible to express in words what this would mean and we hardly want to mention it before it has come true!"

By helping to find effective resettlement and gainful employment, we believe that the spark of self-respect can be fanned alive.

The constant influx of new refugees (now again along the East-West zonal borders) places an ever-increasing burden on the resiliency of the German people. We hope to be able to share with them in seeking creative and constructive solutions to this situation.