

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DR-4
Veterans of '56: III
The Younger Generation

Vienna, Austria
II, Obere Donaustrasse 57/1/6
6 November 1958

Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Paul Heber was born a Hungarian Jew. In the spring of 1940, while in his eighteenth year, he chose to become a refugee from Hitler's Europe. He sailed from Italy in the last Italian ship to leave before Mussolini joined the war, and so came to America and American citizenship. In the following years he became interested in youth work and the postwar years found him involved in teaching and child guidance work in school for delinquent or underprivileged children in New Hampshire, Boston and New York.

Then in October 1956 came news of the rising in Budapest, and Heber decided this was the time to get his mother out of Hungary. But, he reasoned, he would stand a better chance of rescuing her if he appeared in Austria in an official capacity with an authorized Hungarian relief agency, and this brought him to the International Rescue Committee (DR-3).

When he arrived in Vienna, the crisis was at its height. Here the United Nations High Commissioner and the voluntary organizations were just discovering how badly organized they were for handling a refugee rush like the one the Soviet tanks had started westward. The first problem was the simple physical one of moving the refugees from the border crossing points in the Burgenland to the camps hastily being set up in Lower Austria. (Refugees-to-be with foresight and friends in Austria took the precaution of telephoning ahead before leaving Budapest, and so were met at the border and often avoided the camp ordeal altogether - a remarkable possibility in those remarkable days!) The IRC, as part of its contribution at this primitive level, had got hold of a Landrover (the British equivalent of the Jeep), and Paul Heber was one of those who went nightly to Andau to collect a car-load of bordercrossers. One of the sights he saw there was the fantastic one of dozens of unaccompanied children - teenagers and sub-teenagers - coming alone to freedom. It was there that he had his idea for a home for these youngsters and there that he sold the idea to the leaders of the IRC, Claiborne Pell and Angier Duke.

Today Heber's mother is safely settled in Canada, but he remains in Austria as the director of the IRC Boarding School.

In its final form the school, modeled on American homes for "underprivileged" and "problem" children, houses not only the younger of the unaccompanied children, but also specially selected cases from the camps. The present enrollment is 55 children between the ages of $4\frac{1}{2}$ and 14 - the home was designed for 45 and so is a little crowded - and the turnover, for such an institution, is fairly rapid, since parents are continuously emigrating or becoming integrated into the Austrian community and there is always a waiting list for places vacated by those who leave. The only block group, originally 33 in number, consists of the children of all the families involved in the Dominican Republic fiasco last year. These disillusioned and shaken families, after their trip to Trujillo's paradise and back again, were considered by refugee officials to be in such poor emotional state that their children were accepted en masse by the IRC school, then just opening.

The school is Paul Heber's offspring all the way: he had the idea, he found the financial backing, he selected the site, he supervised the conversion of the site into a school, and today he is the heart, soul and mind of the enterprise.

Such a one-man show inevitably had its bad as well as its good side. The staff is part Austrian and part Hungarian and consists, besides Heber, of a parttime occupational therapist, teachers, house parents, secretary, housekeeper, cooks, and maintenance personnel.

The location is nearly ideal. "I looked for an old castle at first," Heber told me. "This was a silly, romantic notion of mine. Luckily, I didn't find one." What he did find was the former estate of a famous turn-of-the-century Viennese actress: a big house in a style typical of the period, with stables down by the road and an eight-acre park of hardwoods and evergreens surrounding it. It is just outside the village of Hadersdorf, on the edge of the Vienna Woods, still within the county of Vienna but far from the city itself - fresh and green and quiet ("healthy" is the word the staff likes to use). A barracks building, originally intended for an IRC project in Yugoslavia that was abandoned before it was properly begun, has been installed on the hill behind the main house and is used as a recreation room and arts-and-crafts laboratory. In the main house, besides rooms for the children - they average six to a room - there are study rooms and a library, a large kitchen and two dining rooms. The stables by the road the youngsters themselves, with professional help on bathrooms and woodwork, have been converting into a combination sickbay and apartment for Heber. In the grounds the children have built a gaily-painted pumphouse and are now making a chicken coop and pigpen, for which occupants will come next spring. Some unemployed Hungarian refugees, under the direction of one of their number who had been an engineer in Hungary, last year built an outdoor swimming pool of concrete, the "modern" rambling shape of which (dictated by the topography of the dell in which it was built) adds a country-club sense of luxury to the park. In winter it is used as a skating rink.

Inside the house, the children's rooms are neat, clean (they do their own bed-making, even the littlest ones, and their own daily housekeeping), and show imagination. The older boys have decorated their walls with pictures of cars, horses and cowboys. The girls have flowers everywhere, and on the walls pictures of fashionable ladies at fashionable spas...and of Brigitte Bardot in God Created Woman! In both boys' and girls' rooms pictures of far away places are popular. On the walls in passageways and common rooms are examples of their own art work, which Heber swears is quite spontaneous and original. If so, they are often very remarkable. A favorite medium of expression is the papier-mache mask, fantastic and fine examples of primitive art.

Heber tells of the problems he encountered in converting the old estate, and the story sheds some light on the tendency of the Austrian economy to be uncompetitive abroad and frustrated at home:

"In order to have the plans of a cess pool approved, a commission consisting of twelve governmental departments arrived for an on-the-spot survey. Permission to start construction was not forthcoming for six weeks. This situation was repeated with nearly every detail."

The governmental departments with which he had to deal at this stage, says Heber, consisted of the following: Ministry of Education; Ministry of Interior, Departments of Youth and Refugee Affairs; Ministry of Social Welfare; Ministry of Sanitation; Ministry of Property and Real Estate, Departments of Water, Electricity, Forestry, Buildings and Construction, "and various sub-departments of each."

(The story is sadly typical. A Vienna friend has told me of almost identical difficulties in getting a "modern" private house built in suburban Grinzing. Construction took almost three years, most of the time being spent in waiting for commissions to come and inspect certain plans and then to consider their approval. When the house was finally completed, he moved in, only to be threatened some months later with a fine the equivalent of several hundred dollars because he had overlooked the requirement that he have permission to occupy his own house.)

The children now in the home all represent "problems", or they would not be there. Before opening day, just a year ago, a team of psychologists toured the camps

interviewing prospective entrants, selecting the most pressing cases. Some were admitted because they were considered either teaching problems or behavior problems and in need of special care; some were the unaccompanied children for whom the school was originally conceived; some were those whose placement was deemed a "social problem." The result is an interestingly mixed group of the mentally retarded or physically handicapped with the "emotionally disturbed" and with some apparently quite normal.

But it is naturally the problems peculiar to refugee children and their efforts at adjustment that are most interesting. Most of these specific problems were generated by the year spent in the camps - "virtually without any sort of structure or discipline in their lives," Heber says. This year of nearly absolute freedom followed a young lifetime in the repressive atmosphere of Communist Hungary. There the significant thing from the point of view of an older child was that the rules of the State were so often in direct conflict with the rules of his parents. It is my notion, which seems to be supported by the more professional observations of social workers like Heber, that the tensions and subsequent tendency to moral skepticism so often noted in refugee youth everywhere are more closely related to this one particular conflict than to anything else.

The problem is not restricted to those who have "escaped" from a regime like the Hungarian into a different world. A number of years ago I talked to Italian friends at some length about an analogous situation following the confusion of the last year of the War in northern Italy. This was the period when Mussolini, deposed and arrested by the King in Rome and rescued by the Gestapo, established his German puppet "Fascist Republic" on the shores of the Lago di Garda. For a time he actually exercised de facto control - by virtue of German bayonets - over the whole northern part of the country, a situation a little like that in Hungary today. The great majority of the people, always anti-German and now (if not before) anti-Fascist, had the moral backing of the royal Badoglio government in Rome (a more legitimate government, but temporarily powerless north of the battle-lines) for their campaign of massive resistance. Even formerly Fascist mayors of North Italian towns joined in a universal and successful effort, for example, to protect their fellow-citizens from Mussolini's eleventh-hour, German-model anti-Semitic laws.

"But how," asked my Italian friends, "do you persuade young people afterward that, while it was perfectly all right to disobey - violently if necessary - the laws of one government at one time, the laws of another government at another time (bearing the same name) are binding on them? If it was patriotic to rob the bank last month, and so deprive the government of funds, why is it immoral this month, because the government has changed? This is very difficult for young peasants to understand and was our great postwar problem in restoring discipline. This problem you do not face in America. There The Law can be respected and a general rule taught. Here one must ask: 'Whose law?' from which follows: 'Why that law?' At this point this is not an easy question for simple minds."

This old conversation came vividly into my mind as I talked to the children at the Hadersdorf school, recognizing the same puzzlement and skepticism. It is probably an over-sophistication to find a special significance in the popularity of the grotesque papier-mache mask as an art project, but the thought did occur.

Newcomers still trickle in from "the other side": I was introduced to a good-looking boy of 14, with towseled blond hair and a gleam of mischief in his eye even when he stood at attention when presented to me (something the older hands there would never think of doing). This lad came through the border all by himself just over a month ago. He wandered as far as Eisenstadt, the capital of the Burgenland, before Austrian authorities picked him up and put him in a refugee camp. There he raised so much trouble that he was kicked out. A succession of camps led to his being referred to the ILC as an urgent problem for their school. At first he announced that he would not stay, but now has decided he likes it and is fitting in rapidly. In the first ten days in the home he gained ten kilos, but he explained to me that this was not so remarkable, since he had lost six in the refugee camps the preceding two weeks. The regained kilos were, I thought, a symbol of a budding

ability to discriminate between different sorts of rules, and to evaluate their various sanctions.

The Hadersdorf school seeks to answer this particular problem by a modified application of modern American pedagogical theories - about which some of the Austrian associates in the experiment are frankly dubious. There are extra-curricular activities, clubs, "democratic" procedures for partial self-government, and a "minimum of repression and negative education, i.e., punishment." Integration into normal Western society is the goal, and so, except in very special cases, all the children now attend the local Austrian school.

If these efforts are proving generally successful, it may be because the home does not take children over 14. The problem is thereby simplified, since it is among the older teenagers that skepticism about the sanctions of social discipline goes deepest. But even for the pre-adolescents, the Hadersdorf experience proves it is there.

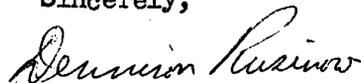
One is bound to sympathize with these youngsters that the double standard we apply is hard to understand. Why do we praise as heroic the same traits in East European teenagers - including the same costumes and haircuts - that we condemn in the West as the preserve of Teddy Boys and Rock-'n'-Rollers? It is the Italian post-Resistance problem, placed on a geographic basis and in the context of the 1950's: why, the child must wonder, is the same conduct praiseworthy east of Andau and blameworthy west of the Neuseidlersee? Why was it right to lie to the police in Budapest but wrong to lie to them in Vienna?

As I left Hadersdorf, the children were listening to the radio, to a broadcast from Hungary. Heber explained that they are allowed to hear anything non-political from Budapest, and that the boys still follow the achievements of Hungarian football teams with much interest. This led me to ask if the children were not pretty thoroughly a-political anyway.

"Not really," Heber said. "A few months ago we got a large package of very nice shirts donated from America, colored sportshirts. Two of them were red, and no one would take them!"

About some things, apparently, there are no doubts and no conflicts for these children of the counter-revolution.

Sincerely,



Dennison Rusinow

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