

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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IMW-1

The Peace Corps----I

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
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Dear Mr. Nolte:

The Peace Corps has certainly attracted our attention. My previous experience in Quaker work camps around the world naturally interested me in the Peace Corps idea, and so I visited their headquarters when I was in Washington a short time ago. Some of my ideas on the Peace Corps and its administration follow. I plan to supplement this newsletter with a second one on the Peace Corps in action in East Africa. The Peace Corps recently announced that their first project will be in Tanganyika, and the American Friends Service Committee will have a similar program there. I look forward to visiting both programs.

I believe the Peace Corps is one of the most imaginative proposals in recent years. Among other things, Peace Corps experience could contribute tremendously to the volunteer's emotional and intellectual maturity. The idea of an army for peace is not new, however. Henry James, in his essay "The Moral Equivalent of War", proposed a similar peace corps. The work camp idea, however, can be considered the logical predecessor to the Peace Corps. It grew out of the efforts of a Swiss Quaker, Pierre Ceresole, to help heal the wounds of World War I by bringing together volunteers to rebuild the shattered villages and schools of France. His camps had pacifist leanings, but were organized with military discipline. Since then work camp discipline has diminished, and a guiding motivation has been the development of self-discipline through democratic, rather than authoritarian, leadership. The work camp movement has become very popular since World War II by assisting needy areas while bringing together young people of varied backgrounds and cultures. But the Peace Corps involves more than this, and their projects should not be considered government financed work camps. It goes far beyond this.

The final form the Peace Corps will take is still vague. It is a semi-autonomous agency within the State Department under Executive Order 10924. Funds for its operation will be drawn from unexpended Mutual Security Act money until such time as a separate appropriation is approved by Congress.

It is expected the annual cost will be between \$20 and \$24 million. There will be five different types of agencies involved in the administration of Peace Corps Projects:

- 1) private voluntary organizations,
- 2) colleges and universities (as agencies for the operation of projects, for the conduct of training programs, and in the provision of research and evaluation services),
- 3) international agencies such as the United Nations and its specialized agencies,
- 4) agencies of the U. S. Government, and
- 5) the Peace Corps.

Peace Corps officials emphasize that each category has a permanent part to play in the Peace Corps, and they welcome inquiries and suggestions from organizations within this classification.

Peace Corps members will be volunteers, and it is expected each will cost the Government \$10-12,000 a year, including such items as training, travel and expenses. For each month spent abroad, the volunteer will receive the equivalent of an Army private's salary (around \$75) which will be given him in a lump sum on his return to the United States. Under some circumstances this monthly allowance may be used to pay for the support of dependents or for other ongoing expenses. The volunteer will also receive a monthly allowance to cover the cost of housing, clothing, food and incidental expenses so that he may live approximately at the level of his counterparts in the host country. Most volunteers will be 22 to 35 years old, but anyone over 18 is eligible, men and women. Persons with skills will be given preference at the outset; especially those in the fields of teaching, agriculture, and public health and welfare. Applicants will be screened for emotional maturity and given a security clearance (probably the cursory one given unskilled Government employees).

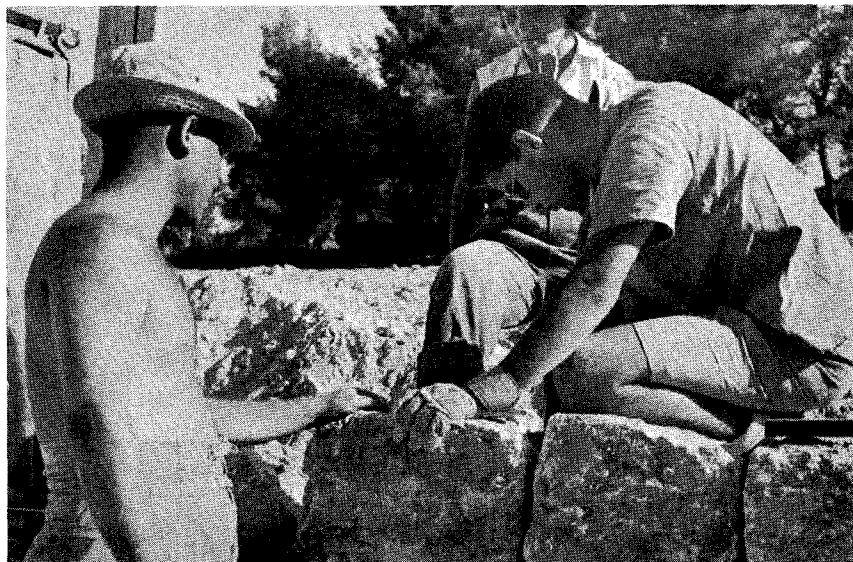
Upon acceptance, the volunteer will take an intensive training course. The first of these courses will begin in June on several college campuses. Some may visit poorer areas in the United States for more specific training. Only one project has been announced so far. In Tanganyika twenty-eight qualified surveyors, engineers and geologists will help build roads. Julius Nyerere, the new Prime Minister, has welcomed this assistance. Future projects will undoubtedly include both group efforts and individual ones. The Peace Corps may also establish a pool of trained manpower on which the underdeveloped countries may call to fill specific temporary needs in their civil services and development plans at Peace Corps rates.

The Peace Corps plans to have 500 volunteers in the field by the end of this year, and it is aiming toward 2000 as soon as possible. Although volunteers will not receive draft exemption, they will probably be deferred during their service. This will result in effective exemption for most, but the local draft boards will have discretion in each case.

Only Americans wanted by a host country will be sent there. The initiative for Peace Corps projects must come entirely from the underdeveloped countries, but they have been informed that their initiative will be welcome. Several countries have already informally expressed interest.

The Peace Corps is anxious to get as many volunteers into the field as soon as possible so it may have something to show Congress when appropriation hearings begin. Private voluntary organizations will play an important role in this effort, since some have similar programs being organized and will send off their first volunteers soon. The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is beginning a program this summer called VISA (Voluntary International Service Assignments) and they plan to have 50 volunteers in the field by the middle of the summer. The AFSC has had considerable experience with this sort of program through community service projects in rural villages (notably in Mexico and Central America) and long term work camps (one in Kenya built a tuberculosis hospital over a period of two years). VISA will do specific jobs in community service under the auspices of the AFSC and local organizations, who will be encouraged to pay as much of the local costs as possible. Volunteers will not serve as experts (most are just now finishing college and are around 21), but as amateurs, whose interest and enthusiasm encourages the community to help itself. The AFSC feels "through personal involvement in the problem, a young adult can better comprehend tension and its solutions." Thus the emphasis is upon the mature and responsible development of the individual and the community. VISA projects will be located around the world.

The AFSC estimates its annual expenses per volunteer will run around \$3000 (compared to the Peace Corps estimate of \$10-12,000). Each volunteer will be asked to contribute what he can toward his costs, but there is generous financial aid available, and no one will be turned down solely for financial reasons. These people can more accurately be termed volunteers. The leaders of VISA groups (appointees who have all their expenses paid by the AFSC, although serving without salary) are now making preliminary surveys of the areas in which their teams will be stationed.



WORK CAMPS

Volunteers in Israel help build a retaining wall for a school playground (above).

An Israeli girl weeds around a young tree recently planted as part of a reforestation project (below).



Government participation in the VISA program (if it is forthcoming) would serve to enlarge an existing program rather than create a new one. Nevertheless it is doubtful whether the AFSC will accept money appropriated to MSA. Thus I consider the recently announced suggestion to establish a foundation with Executive funds to be a method of getting around the AFSC's and other similar organizations' reticence to use funds appropriated for military or para-military purposes. Of course such a foundation also enables private individuals to give directly to the Peace Corps.

On the whole VISA is an individual, tailor-made program in which the learning experience is emphasized. I find myself in great sympathy with this approach. Many of the problems of a large program are avoided. Thus it was heartening to hear Gordon Boyce (Director of Private Agency Relations, Peace Corps) say that private voluntary organizations will play a crucial and permanent role in the developing Peace Corps.

The Peace Corps is an excellent idea, but there will be great difficulties in carrying it out successfully. Here are a few comments on what I consider to be some of the more important administrative and political ones. High on the list is the question of leadership. Leadership under such circumstances will require skill, training and a good measure of patience and human understanding, and I wonder where they will find enough suitable persons. Evidently a number of those who have volunteered their services have been in supervisory positions, and the Peace Corps appears to be relying on them. Whether this experience will prove valuable in mainly leading groups of young college graduates in primitive lands remains to be seen.

Secondly, I question the realism of expecting volunteers to live and work under local conditions. A work camp of several months is one thing, but I doubt if many Americans could live for protracted periods under truly primitive conditions. The Peace Corps is aware of this problem, and there is evidence it will allow volunteers to live at a higher level. Rigorous selection and extensive training will minimize this problem, of course.

Thirdly, I question the advisability and necessity for security clearances. It will dissuade those who feel it has no place in such a program and who have religious or philosophical scruples against them. It will also give the wrong impression to recipient nations. There is already widespread suspicion

in some countries that Peace Corps volunteers are government agents, and requiring security clearances can only reinforce that view. If private organizations are made to submit their volunteers to clearances, there are obvious drawbacks, especially under circumstances where Peace Corps money accounts for only a portion of total activity (i.e., which volunteers will be considered Peace Corps personnel needing clearances, and which will come under the sole jurisdiction of the private agency?).

Perhaps the most pressing problems, however, are political. I wonder how many countries will want to have Peace Corps projects, at least until volunteers have proven themselves mature, well-trained workers. In countries where there are sizable numbers of unemployed intellectuals (India, Indonesia, etc.), Peace Corps projects will no doubt create considerable tension, even though most of the unemployed are so only because they consider manual labor beneath their dignity. This is an urgent problem, because the Philippines, which has a large number of unemployed intellectuals, is high on the list for projects because of their long friendship with the United States. I believe volunteers should work unobtrusively among the people and avoid any indication of paternalism. They should try to avoid clustering together in American colonies, and live as nearly as possible under local conditions. A small percentage of the volunteers will probably not fit into the routine. This is only natural, but if the value of the project is above question and the organization thorough, it should be able to withstand adverse criticism as a result of those few not suited to this type of service.

We must also be prepared for a reaction from the eastern bloc in the form of communist peace corps. This should not influence U. S. policy, but our Government should be aware of the possibility and consider what it's policy will be under the circumstances.

Finally, the charge that the Peace Corps is a propaganda agency should be vigorously opposed. At the Third All-African People's Conference held in Cairo March 25 to 30, the Peace Corps was attacked and a conference resolution warned against "the representatives from imperialist and colonial countries under the cover of religious, cultural, trade unions, youth and philanthropic organizations". Increased participation in United Nations programs with Peace Corps personnel might dull this criticism. Recently our Ambassador to the United Nations, Adlai Stevenson, suggested that Peace Corps volunteers be sent overseas to work for the specialized agencies. Stevenson also suggested other nations join in this effort. Another way of dulling criticism would be to create a bi-lateral peace corps,

so volunteers from recipient countries could work and learn in our poorer areas. In this way many future leaders of underdeveloped countries would have an opportunity to work among Americans and understand our problems.

It appears the Peace Corps idea is here to stay. While its aim is to achieve rapid development along democratic lines in the underdeveloped world, it presents a good opportunity to stress technical assistance (as opposed to economic development). In my opinion, the United States' emphasis on economic development overshadows technical assistance unduly. The Peace Corps will also be, however, a learning experience for Americans. In the past, lack of contact with foreign countries has led to an insular approach. I'm convinced the Peace Corps represents increased international thinking on our part. Volunteers will return to the United States after their service with a depth and breadth of view ideal for the foundation of a more concerned and intelligent foreign policy toward our less fortunate neighbors. In Sargent Shriver's own words, they may help to create "a substantial popular base for American policies toward the world."

Or so we hope!

Sincerely yours,



Ian Michael Wright

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