

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

IMW-2

The Peace Corps-----II
 Selection and Orientation

On board the
 S.S. Rhodesia Castle
 July 20, 1961

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
 Institute of Current World Affairs
 366 Madison Avenue
 New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

In my opinion, the flurry of interest in the Peace Corps and its prospective projects has obscured the immediately important problems of selecting and training volunteers. Their life is not going to be an easy one; it will be tremendously difficult. Therefore to a large extent the success of the program will depend upon the selection and training of the most highly qualified volunteers. In this newsletter I want to compare two different approaches to these questions: that of CARE's Peace Corps project for Colombia, and that of the American Friends Service Committee's (AFSC) VISA project for Tanganyika. I have chosen these two projects for comparison because they are similar in several ways. First, both are organized by private voluntary organizations; one the first Peace Corps project to be contracted to a private agency, and the other totally independent but with similar motivation (see IMW-1). Second, both will work within the field of community development to help raise the standards of village life. The term underdeveloped usually refers to the neglect of the local community where needs are most urgent and desperate. Both projects will directly relate to the daily lives of people in their own villages. Lastly, the volunteers will not regularly work as a group but will be stationed in far-flung villages independently or with local counterparts, and supervision will be general only.

The last two points would indicate that both orientation programs would have similar objectives. Below I will discuss each project briefly, its method of selecting volunteers, and the composition of its orientation program. I will deal with each project separately, and in conclusion I will make some comments of my own.

* * * * *

For the past several years CARE (Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere, Inc.) has moved increasingly into the field of community development. Last year, with the encouragement of the government of President Alberto Lleras Camargo, CARE staffed and carried out, with equal financial support from the National Federation of Coffee Growers of Colombia, a survey of community development activities and

potentials in Colombia. The Peace Corps project had its origins in this report and the interest it generated in Colombia. On August 27 sixty-four volunteers (only men) will leave for Bogota to undertake assignments such as well-drilling, laying water and sewage pipe lines, working with local crews on building projects, organizing youth clubs, introducing audio-visual information on health and farm production problems, explaining the use of new tools, and suggesting ways for more efficient use of local materials.

In a booklet prepared especially for prospective volunteers, CARE says:

"The Peace Corps Volunteer need not be a technician...; but he will need imagination, experience and training to recognize local problems and opportunities. He will be trained in when and where to call upon technical help from Colombian ministries and agencies as well as from U.S. experts located in that country.

"Most important, the volunteer will not be alone in his work. In most cases he will be working in partnership with a Colombian of similar age and training. He and his counterpart will work as a team who will have opportunity to share their thoughts and problems with technicians, administrators and consultants in many different fields."

Each volunteer will receive the same wage as his counterpart, the equivalent of \$150.00 per month. An additional \$75.00 per month will accumulate at home, but this can't be drawn upon until the volunteer terminates his contract. Each person will be provided with clothing and tools and covered by life, dental, surgical and dismemberment insurance. Medical care is provided, as is thirty days leave per annum with an extra \$5.00 per day during this period.

Local administration will be carried out by a CARE Project Director. The Peace Corps will provide a liaison officer who will report directly to the U.S. Ambassador and to Peace Corps Headquarters.

Since CARE has had no experience in the selection of volunteers for this sort of work, and since they wanted to get the project in operation as quickly as possible, they are cooperating with the Peace Corps in choosing the most qualified. The process is a long one and has two stages:

1. Those initially selected on the basis of their application blanks, Peace Corps test scores and personal references will be invited to take part in a training program at Rutgers University.
2. At the end of the training program the final sixty-four volunteers will be chosen on the basis of their performance during orientation.

CARE wants their volunteers to have a broad educational background, a basic knowledge of Spanish and a limited technical knowledge. Most will have lived at least part of their lives in rural areas. CARE's timetable for the selection of volunteers follows:

June 5: CARE will review application folders of potential volunteers. A letter outlining the program will be sent to approximately 400 persons indicating that those to be invited to the orientation will be contacted later.

June 13: CARE sends telegrams to approximately 130 volunteers inviting them to participate in the training program and emphasizing that this is only an invitation and does not guarantee final selection.

June 25: Volunteers arrive at Rutgers.

June 26: to August 12: Selection process continues with physical and psychological tests, a psychiatric interview, reports on academic performance, interview with selection committee, and each volunteer will rate his peers.

August 12 to 17: Final selection of the sixty-four volunteers on the basis of their performance at the orientation and the evaluation of staff personnel and his peers.

More than twice the number of possible appointees will be invited to take part in the training program. Those obviously unfit for assignment to Colombia will be dropped at stated intervals, but in spite of this constant attrition, it is expected that more people will complete the training program satisfactorily than can be appointed to Colombia. Those persons will be placed in the following categories:

1. Continuing Trainees: These will be asked to consider two further weeks of study for another CARE-Peace Corps program now under negotiation in another Latin American country.
2. Peace Corps Reserve---active status. These volunteers will be called upon for training in other kinds of Peace Corps projects almost immediately.
3. Peace Corps Reserve---inactive status. These men will have performed satisfactorily, but because of their qualifications, they do not fulfill the requirements of currently developed Peace Corps projects.

In considering the orientation of CARE volunteers, it must constantly be borne in mind that it forms part of the selection process, and therefore is somewhat different from an ordinary training program. Orientation begins on June 25 and lasts for eight weeks, ending on August 17. CARE has stated the objectives of the program as follows:

1. To insure a basic reading and speaking knowledge of Spanish.
2. To provide a basic knowledge of Latin America and Colombia.
3. To deepen capacities for interpreting U.S. attitudes, history and problems as they relate to other peoples.
4. To provide a basic knowledge of Community Development as a significant technique of progressive social change.
5. To provide a general knowledge of technical specialties necessary for community improvement, and when and where to call on technical help.
6. To physically train and condition the Volunteers and to give them guidance on problems of adjusting to a new environment.

The program itself is extremely rigorous. There is very little free time, as each day is scheduled roughly from seven in the morning to ten in the evening. Sunday is a free day until evening study hours. The basic courses encompassed in the Rutgers program are:

1. Spanish Conversation and Reading---16 hours per week.
2. Latin American and Colombian History, Geography, Demography, Culture, Economics, Politics---8 hours.
3. The American Heritage and its Relation to Foreign Affairs---6 hours.
4. Community Development and Related Technical Problems ---3 hours of lectures, 1 hour of discussion and 5 hours of lectures on technical subjects.
5. Physical Training and Conditioning---7 hours. This will include briefing on personal health safeguards while in Colombia.
6. Testing---2 hours.
7. Scheduled Study Hours---10 hours.

Thus each day will be spent attending classes and in an academic atmosphere. A large number of instructors have been called upon to assist in this venture.

At the end of the training period those finally chosen for service in Colombia will visit the United Nations and the CARE offices in New York before being given an eight day home leave. In Bogota they will undertake an additional month of study, with lectures and seminars in Spanish, field trips to community development projects, and practical instruction in technical problems, tools, equipment, and in Colombian institutions and customs.

Altogether this process takes about three months. I believe this program will serve as a prototype for future Peace Corps programs, and it is for this reason that I have described it in such detail.

The AFSC's VISA program (Voluntary International Service Assignments) is sending eight men and four women to Tanganyika for two years. There they will work under the direction of Tanganyika's Community Development Department, presumably with the Chagga and Meru tribes, near Moshi which is on the slopes of Kilimanjaro. Again the volunteers will work alone in different villages in the area. It is hoped, however, that they will be able to spend their weekends together in order to discuss their experiences and by so doing increase their effectiveness as a group. In VISA the emphasis is equally upon the development of the individual and the community.

VISA volunteers receive no compensation and even have to supply their own clothing and pocket money. If this proves an undue hardship on volunteers, however, this policy may be reversed. The AFSC provides transportation and medical care and insurance, although at the outset each volunteer was asked to contribute as much as he could of his probable expenses (estimated at \$3000 a year). A Field Director will be on the spot to act as liaison officer with the Tanganyika Government, carry out field administration, and generally supervise the work of the volunteers.

Although this particular program is new, the AFSC has had considerable experience in choosing people for similar projects. The applicant first fills out a lengthy application form which asks not only questions of a factual nature but also his philosophical approach to certain questions. Several personal references are also required. If the applicant seems promising, he is brought to Philadelphia at the AFSC's expense for a series of interviews. He meets members of the personnel committee and VISA staff, and he has physical and psychiatric examinations. After this procedure a final decision is made, and if he is accepted, he is given a specific assignment in one of the several VISA projects now planned. Most volunteers are recent college or university graduates, and most are inexperienced in the area of community development.

As with CARE, orientation and training are divided into two sections. There is one month of training in the United States (June 18 to July 19) and a seven week training course at Tengeru, near Moshi.* Those at Tengeru have advised against the inclusion of language training (Swahili) in the United States on the ground that a single intensive course is more effective than two courses using different methods.

Most of the American training program will take place at Pendle Hill, a Quaker retreat near Philadelphia. Basically the orientation is quite different from CARE's. There is much

* I understand this is the same center where Peace Corps volunteers will be trained later this year.

less academic work involved, and instead of numerous classes, each day is devoted to one or two lectures and discussion. Thus much of the orientation depends upon the quality of the volunteers, and the atmosphere is much like a seminar.

The U.S. orientation was divided into five parts. The first week was devoted to Quaker philosophy and the AFSC, its background and activities at home and abroad, with special emphasis on current work in Africa. Between the 27th and 29th of June, the group went to Washington for a round of talks with people in varied fields such as foreign policy, the United Nations, special problems of East Africa (Gordon Hagberg), the Peace Corps (Congressman Henry S. Reuss, now proposing legislation for the Peace Corps), interracial housing in Washington (Robert Weaver), the Food for Peace program (George McGovern) and the role of non-violence in integration (William Coffin).

From the first to the fifteenth of July, the volunteers had an intensive area study which included African (especially Tanganyikan) history, geography and culture. The end of this time was devoted to seminars on community development (concepts rather than techniques which they will get at Tengeru).

Their last three days in the United States (July 16-19) were spent in New York visiting the United Nations and observing the workings of the Friends Neighborhood Group in Harlem. Today they arrive in London on their way to Moshi.

Physical labor was also included in the program. Not only were there sports, but the volunteers also spent some time in the AFSC clothing warehouse. In future AFSC orientation groups it is hoped to have community development work (perhaps for as long as several weeks) form part of the program.

* * * * *

It is not only difficult but perhaps unfair to judge these two orientation programs until it is possible to evaluate their influence on the volunteers' performance. I would like to draw attention, however, to some of my own questions about certain assumptions and methods.

In both programs about three out of the twenty-four months of active service are to be spent in some form of orientation. Since the aim of both is to get qualified people into the field as soon as possible, the length of these programs could be, although not necessarily, excessive. In the past many qualified American technicians have proved unsuitable for jobs in foreign countries, and since many of them received little orientation before they left, it has been commonly assumed their failure is due to this. This may be

true in most cases, but I think it unwise to assume it true in every case. The usual problems people face in this sort of work are personal and involve a difficulty in communication. This is not the sort of problem length of orientation will improve. In my opinion this is the crucial point and receives less emphasis than it should. People either can communicate with others of a different culture or can't. I believe that only the capable person can benefit from such an orientation program. The important thing is to experience the culture personally, and for this reason the volunteer should get into the field as soon as possible. What orientation is necessary (and I include here language and technical training) could better be achieved on the spot if only because it gives the individual time to become acclimated. Ten years ago there was probably too much emphasis on orientation, but we may have swung to the other extreme today.

I think the objective of an American orientation should be to help the volunteers develop their own potential for living and working with people of a different culture; to orient them to a different way of life. I don't see how people can experience this development if those taking part don't know if they will ever use the training they receive. I hope future programs will not burden their orientation programs with the psychological strains inherent in such a process.

At the present time I think we need to develop methods of determining just who those few people are who are fit for this type of work. The key may lie with psychiatric interviews, but in the end the decisions will still be made by ordinary men.

Just before I left the United States, I attended the first few days of the VISA orientation program for those going to Tanganyika. Although most of them were young and inexperienced, I was impressed by their intelligence and the depth of their motivation. I am sure that if anyone can succeed, they will.

Very sincerely yours,



Ian Michael Wright

Received New York August 7, 1961