

Radio - speech made by UNRRA Principal  
Welfare-Officer Prof. R.C. Riggle.  
B.B.C., 13-th of February 1947.

Hamburg D.P. University Study Center.

England, as an American, I give you my hand in good fellowship. After living with you for three war years and for over a year in the British Zone of Germany, my debt to you is a vast one. For you have taught me many things about life and how to live it, that is good for a man to know. And now I want to repay a ~~little of that debt~~ by telling you a story in which you may find a meaning that will serve some good purpose.

I wish I could be alone with each of you by the fire, drinking a cup of hot English tea or sitting in a quiet corner of a country pub with a glass of mild and bitter. For this is an intimate story to be told when the body is relaxed and the soul is receptive. It has to do with the human spirit. And how it can never be defeated, if it is supported by faith and love and imbued with courage.

A little over a year ago, I arrived in Hamburg, on a cold windy night. The old Army lorry that had brought us from Holland, bowling along the Autobahn, creeping through dark streets of ruined towns, stopped with a sigh before the huge ultra-modern insurance building known as "Deutscher Ring".

It had been converted into an assembly center for over a thousand refugees, who had drifted in from all parts of Germany. They represented many nations. Here they were fed, housed, documented, prepared for a return to their homes. But there were some among them who could not return. Lonely, in an alien land, they were doomed to stand and wait.

But the busy mind and the lively heart must keep moving. Faith, hope and love survive catastrophe and, inspired by courage, not only sustain us, but actually demand action from us. And such action surmounting obstacles often carries us surprisingly far.

I shall never forget the first Sunday morning in January, 1946. Sunlight from the mended window of the office room, shone unofficially on a curious collection of official heads, members of the Prisoner of War and Displaced Persons, Division of the British Military Government and members of Deutscher Ring UNRRA Team. They represented England, Canada, America, Holland, Belgium and Latvia. There they sat calmly creating a University Study Center. Aided, and in fact, abetted by Professor Fricis Gulbis, the refugee Deputy Rector of the University of Riga in Latvia. There they sat calmly creating a University Study Center. Aided, and in fact, abetted by Professor Fricis Gulbis, the refugee Deputy Rector of the University of Riga in Latvia.

Frankly, I was aghast at such bravado. As a former University professor, I knew only too well the complications of University life and the



problems of its administration functioning in normal communities in times of peace and plenty. But the idea of daring to attempt to create a University in the midst of chaos, when even the necessities of life were hard to come by, was the kind of exaggerated adventure to which a man cannot say no. I must make it plain that at this time we hadn't a sheet of paper or a pencil, nothing except the idea. Nevertheless, on this January Sunday a general plan was outlined for a University.

When I began work with the planning committee, I was immediately impressed with their courage and their will to survive and to achieve. They were refugee professors. They had lost the post, in which many of them had figured as men of importance and substance, their future was unknown. All they had the day by day present. Such as it was. A few personal belongings, a bed in an overcrowded room, soup and, from time to time, the contents of a Red Cross package. As an American used to an abundance of everything, their fortitude and above all their determination go to forward, was amazing.

To find buildings in a bombed city where every room was at premium seemed impossible. Equipment? Even the Army was hard pressed for Stationer's supplies. Furniture? None was being manufactured, and available supplies were requisitioned. Then there was the simple problem of electric light bulbs. Not one was officially available. From the academic side: refugee professors must be found, their qualifications checked, travel orders arranged.

Professor Gulbis called a meeting of a provisional Rectorate. Prof. Dr. Üpik, Estonian astronomer, musical composer, was the Estonian Rector, Prof. Dr. Dunsdorfs, Economist, Boy Scout Executive, the Latvian Rector, Prof. Dr. Stanka, Lawyer, Representative to the Hague, the Lithuanian Rector. As I sat there listening with wonder, I knew that a way would be found.

The problem of housing. Well, the first blow fell when Deutscher Ring was taken for the Headquarter of the Hamburg German Police. But we were given a barracks camp three minutes away in a former church graveyard, later the Zoological Gardens, called Zoo Camp. We had a lot of fun with that name. It had seen hard service as a German workers camp, then as a transient camp for thousands of refugees from countries as far apart as China and Chile. As we say in American, "It was plenty beat up". Under the directives of a young Lithuanian Civil Engineer, Dirvianskis, trees were encouraged to leaf, flowers to blossom, stoves to function, buildings to be rain-proof and painted and people to be happy. I've never known such a busy affirmative place as Zoo Camp. And no one stopped to ask where it was leading. The medical and dental clinics built from bits and pieces were excellent. One barracks was set aside for shops, shoe repair, tailor, barber, seamstress, and even a beaticean who had a hair drying machine. The experimental school for professors' children where only English was spoken was of particular interest to visiting celebrities. The girl students made colourful window draperies out of German naval flags, flower brackets from tin cans, invention was everywhere.

Fifteen minutes away on the U-Bahn was Alsterdorf Camp. Smaller and, as the residents insisted, more exclusive than Zoo Camp. As the University grew, it became an auxiliary Dormitory Camp. And from its flag pole proudly flew the British flag and its companion the D.P. University flag, three golden bars, waved like the Baltic sea, each for one of the three Baltic States, on white background that grew a bit grey with time.

Across the street from Zoo Camp, we discovered a wreck of a building



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which had once been the Headmaster's House of the next door Hochschule. It had been bombed, rebuilt, used as a German firewatcher's post, later as quarters for British Army guards who, in the early days, guarded Zoo Camp. Requisitioned from the sceptical Town Major, we rehabilitated it. The kitchen became the reception room for the Secretariate working in the former dining and living rooms. The spacious clothes closet, with additional shelves, was perfect for the stationers stores. Bedrooms were offices for UMRRA and University officials. And in the bathroom was an excellent photograph laboratory. In the cellar we established the Dzilas, a Latvian family, who quickly took charge of the house, the yard and us.

So at last we had rooms in which to sleep, to eat, to study and offices, but still no proper place for classes. The Military suggested that a fragment of a building may have survived in the vast and once important Blohm and Voss shipyards. So off we dashed, dock passes in hand, in our African campaign jeep with the bellowing top, in the rain under dark skies. Travelling through the tunnel under the Elbe river, we came out on the island and found monumental destruction. Great cranes leaning at strange angles, uprooted railway tracks and smashed dry docks and buildings. Only two floors of the Administration building were intact. The frail old doorman in a tattered uniform welcomed us with a vague gesture and faded away. When we entered the lobby the sky was above us, and the rain fell on a bust of Hindenburg rising on its pedestal over the wreckage. The rain ran down that unhappy face and presented a kind of symbol of a ruined nation. On the second floor front, in a room with peeling plaster and warped furniture sat several hungry-looking men in black overcoats. Formerly executives of ten shipyards with a power rivalled only by officials of Clyde Bank, they were doomed to watch the slow dissolution of all that had been built up with such care and effort. They welcomed our interruption. After cigarettes and a little softening, they opened up. They told us about the Museum for Hamburg History. After the severe bombing of July 1944, they had moved certain offices into Museum rooms, but had recently vacated them.

We leaped in the jeep, back through the tunnel, past the large grotesque idealisation of Bismark in cement and to the Museum, across the street what is now the Forces' Marlborough Club.

It had been bombed and the entire rear of the buildings was in ruins. Shopkeepers had installed themselves in the rooms that the cathedrals in the old days because of the lack of housing. Wasn't it Benjamin Franklin who was apprenticed to a printer whose shop was in London's Bartholomews Cathedral?

We found five habitable rooms and saw the possibility of reconditioning twenty-eight of thirty more. So we requisitioned two thirds of the Museum leaving one third to the Museum authorities. Funds for rebuilding were obtained from the Burgomaster's fund about which I knew nothing but which seemed to have a legendary vastness. And for five months German worksmen and the students laboured to revive the building. At first the work progressed rapidly but as the caloric content of the food ration diminished the workers showed the strain. We begged materials from each officer who controlled them. This was in the days before Economic Branches of MilGov. Suddenly there were no nails, or glass, or cement. Off we dashed in the jeep to beg. Almost always we got some of the amount we needed. Particularly, ~~we were able to~~ get the controlling officer to see the work at the Museum and to feel the enthusiasm there. Glass was scarce, so we used ~~tin~~ flattened out painted grey.

The big bombed window on the grand stairway was completely gone. We fil-



led it in with wood, painted grey and against it were arranged great shields of the three Baltic nations, in colour, and of the eight Faculties of the University in monotone, bound together with painted branches of the academic oak. The refugee designer, Krumins, is from Riga. His inspiration rested somewhat on my issue of NAAFI cigarettes. A charming little man. I'll never forget the round head like an apple on a slender stem, bowing, with two fingers placed over his heart saying, "Thank you, Sair Riggle". We had a mutual sympathy. I am an American; he has a sister in Boston.

The newly-appointed non-nazi curator of the Museum, Dr. Havernick seeing the enthusiastic work of the refugees, pulled his small staff together and began a furious activity in his portion of the building. In September they opened, formally, with a splendid display of the Commercial History of Hamburg. In the opening address he paid a gracious tribute to the refugees, who far from their homes, hounded by insecurity and hopelessness, had had the courage and the belief strong enough to create an University and, in doing so give hope and opportunity for hundreds of their own youth, and inspiration to him and to his fellow workers.

Now the University had at last a place for classes, in many ways superior to the accommodations for the Hamburg University or the University of Kiel. A contract was made with the Bismarck Schule for the use of their chemistry laboratory, another contract for the use of the City Library, and another for the Marianhospital for our medical students. By diverting some of our fuel issue to the Anatomical Institute of the Hamburg University we were given part-time use of their rooms and equipment. The observatory and planetarium were made available. And the British Army permitted us to use the Post Office Gymnasium and equipment and the huge Rothenbaumchaussee playing field for our active sports department.

But what about equipment in a world where every chair was precious and where envelopes were used more than once ?

We knew a refugee from Guatemala who knew a man who had heard of a factory in Westphalen. We organised some trucks and made a pilgrimage. Uncovered several hundred chairs and tables, some blackboards and drawing boards. This was in the first days of the 80 G Form, needed for the release of such articles. Life was still a little wild. We had furnished our office building with furniture which the men of the Sports Department had transferred from Deutscher Ring, I am afraid by night. But now we had an 80 G Form and life was a little less buoyant. How we obtained microscopes, drawing instruments, etc. is too complicated and involved to recall or retell.

But there is that matter of the herbarium taken to Berlin by a professor of the University of Riga. He was later killed in an air raid. Professor Apinis discovered the herbarium. It was transported to Bad Oeynhausen in the 30 Corps in an Army train, hauled it to Hamburg in UNRRA trucks. It has one of the most complete collection of Asiatic mosses in the world.

Blohm and Voss yielded some technical books and a quantity of chemicals and chemistry laboratory equipment which we installed in five small rooms in the Museum.

Then Mr. Priede came into our life. A young Latvian graduate of Faculty of Mechanical Engineering of the University of Riga. He looked as delicate as a girl, but for him and his workmen the construction of the mechanical engineering laboratory became a brilliant game of chance. In the Kiel shipyards he found an abandoned water-brake. UNRRA collected tools from a dismantled factory near Schleswig, and Mr. Priede added them to his rare collection. (Tools have always been a problem. The lack of them had held



back the development of many projects). Then came the news that lifted the game of chance and Mr. Priede to a kind of engineers' heaven. A quantity of machinery, tools and physics laboratory equipment looted from the University of Vytautas in Kaunas, Lithuania by the Germans, had been traced by Lithuanian refugees and aided by UNRRA and the British Army had collected them in Uchte in the 30 Corps. Negotiations were established and the entire amount was sent to us in eighteen UNRRA trucks. Some of the professors and students who are using this equipment today, used it in Lithuania before the war.

But this is an extraordinary incident. The rule was to admit a need, then to start out to find, to beg, to borrow and to steal. For our University grew in a period of reckless adventure and we used pirate methods, now we are in the settling-down period, duller but safer, more satisfying but less exciting.

So many times in the pirate period we felt alone against the world. And there was a kind of proud, bitter, young man quality in our attitude, but we were lonely. We welcomed, therefore, with enthusiasm Mr. Frykholm of the World Student Relief Association, Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. He established a shuttle service. Text books from Switzerland, paper from Sweden. (So different from our shuttle service during the war, bombs from England, reload in Italy and bomb on the war back). The paper was used to reprint the text books so the whole thing tied up into a very neat package that meant education and hope for 1200 students. The Lithuanian Relief Association of New York City sent 800 books to Bremen, UNRRA trucks brought them to Hamburg. The Baltic Humanitarian Association in Stockholm sent textbooks and periodicals. The Gospel Mission in London sent theological literature, and Mr. Long personally sent precious packages of clothing, thread, shoe nails etc. A Mrs. Baltramaitis in Chicago, Secretary of a Lithuanian Society, sent the proceeds of a dance in the form of the Encyclopedia Britannica. Because of shipping problems each volume arrived one at a time. The suspense was painful, but the full set is now in our library which now comprises almost 4000 volumes as well as a great quantity of periodicals. Demobbed Army officers, friends of the University, sometimes sent their strange collections. I drove the jeep to Bremen and Miss Webster of Special Services Libraries, loaded it up with U.S. Army School Manuals and text books left behind by departing units. This was the blind man's buff way in which the University took shape.

The YMCA - YWCA donated sports equipment and musical instruments. The sports department gave a brilliant display on May 25, but shortly afterward was forced to curtail its program. 1500 calories were not sufficient for the extra energy needed.

And now for the academic side of the coin !

The university administration staff includes the President, three Rectors (one for each nationality), the Senate, the Council of Deans of the Eight Faculties and Department Head. Each office is filled by democratic election. The Secretariate is in three sections, representing each the three Baltic States.

The one hundred and seventy professors were chosen very carefully on the basis of their scholarship and teaching experience. Each Faculty has mixture of professors, associate professors, lecturers and assistants from the three states. The common language is German, although courses are taught in English and in the native language. Many of these men are now carrying on research work which has resulted in the publication of twenty-four original theses and the development of an exchange mailing list with forty colleges and Universities as widely separated as the University of



Chicago and the Université de Genève.

There are over a thousand students, men and women. Because of their delayed education the average age is somewhat greater than is usual. Their names were first submitted to Camp Commandants, UNRRA workers, or refugee committee officials. Lists were composed, from which candidates were chosen by the Rectors and their committees. The qualifications of each student were carefully considered. He must have attended a college or University in his native country.

No diploma is granted a graduate of the Hamburg D.P. University. He is given a certificate concerning the amount and quality of work accomplished. Many professors have told me that on the average the work done by the students was of a better quality than in the home Universities.

The University has no Charter. It is guided only by a directive issued by joint council of UNRRA and Education Branch of CCG.

The University has no budget. It has grown, as you see, almost wholly as one might say, by the Grace of God.

For the past year the professors received no salaries, but last week they received their first monthly salary through the Pioneer Corps Labour Unit in Hamburg. Meanwhile many of them gave all they had to the University which had grown to mean so much in their lives.

A month ago recognition came like a revelation when the opportunity was given for the University Study Center to leave its decentralized setup in Hamburg and move into the Allenby Barracks, a former ultra modern Luftwaffe School, in Pinneberg only 20 kilometers from Hamburg. Here in the country, housed in modern brick and stone buildings, with land for gardening, with space for laboratories and with the opportunity to maintain and even increase the associations so laboriously constructed during the past year in Hamburg, the Hamburg D.P. University Study Center is entering a new phase of its development.

And now, dear friends, in England or wherever you may be, my story is told. And it seems to me, as I think of it, that this is not just the story of how University grew out of nothing, how an ordered scheme was developed out of chaos, or how well UNRRA and the Control Commission for Germany are doing their jobs, or how refugees without a past, with only a present, have found a future, but rather it seems to me that this is a story of how the human spirit asserts itself and contrives to triumph over adversity. How it can never be defeated, but supported by faith and love and imbued with courage it continues always its inexorable and wonderful advance.