

Orientation of International Trainees

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EVERY year some 35,000 students, scholars, and trainees visit the United States to study American methods and techniques in their fields; about 3,000 are taking part in exchange programs under Government auspices. These men and women come from all parts of the world to what is for most of them a new country with a different culture, a different tempo of living, and a strange language. Despite these handicaps, many are expected to learn new techniques or professional skills in a relatively short time. To make their stay in the United States more rewarding—both for the visitors themselves and for the host country—special programs have been developed. One of these is a 1-week, general program for all trainees. It is designed not only to give the visitors time to adjust to their new surroundings but also to provide a place where they may get answers to their questions about the problems of everyday living in this country and where they may have unhurried talks with interested persons. For the social service trainees, this week is followed by a week of orientation to welfare services in the United States and a 2-week observation program in an American community.

General Program

Background

Experience with the problem of orienting foreign nationals led the American Council on Education to set up, in March 1950, a center in Washington, D.C., where a brief orientation program could be conducted. The Washington International Center was established to serve German leaders brought to the United States by the Department of State to help orient "the German people . . . through educational, cultural, and informational activities." Japanese leaders were later included in the

program, which continued for both Germany and Japan as long as the exchange plan for leaders in occupied areas was in effect.

In 1951 the Council, at the request of the Department of State, the Department of the Army, the Economic Cooperation Administration, and the Technical Cooperation Administration, arranged a similar orientation plan for many visitors coming to the United States under the exchange program of these agencies. Trainees under other programs were added to the list when the sponsoring departments realized that their visitors were not getting the maximum benefit from their stay because they had had no organized introduction to the American pattern of living and that, as a result, the potentialities for developing friendship between these visitors and people in the United States were not being fully realized. Today almost all exchange programs initiate their trainees' stay in this country with a week at the Washington International Center.

The Center is in a large, comfortable residence, conveniently located, with livingroom, sunroom, and garden in which trainees can gather for discussions and relaxation. A small library is furnished with a collection of books and magazines dealing with many aspects of American life and assembled under the guidance of librarians who volunteer for this work.

The broad objectives of the exchange programs are the foundation on which the more immediate goals of the orientation program must be based. The first broad objective is to promote friendship and cooperation among nations by helping the visitors understand American ideals and institutions; the second is to aid each visitor to improve living standards in his own country by helping him acquire the specialized technical and professional knowledge and skills best suited for the purpose.

With these objectives as a guide, the Washington International Center

sets its own immediate program goals: (1) to provide a general introduction to life and institutions in the United States; (2) to create a warm and friendly atmosphere within the Center where the visitor can first meet both Americans and leaders from other countries; (3) to help the visitor acquire the self-confidence and skills needed to establish effective contacts in other communities by introducing him in Washington to persons, agencies, and resources similar to those he will find elsewhere; and (4) to use the visitors' presence in the national capital to evoke among local residents appreciation of the countries and programs of the visitors.

The Center's regular staff has a background of experience in education, social work, and international relations, combined with a sensitivity to the personal and individual needs of the foreign visitors and the capacity to meet the needs of large groups. The volunteer staff consists of about 1,000 persons who have offered their services, individually and by families, in response to talks given by the Center's regular staff members and others at small group meetings throughout the city. These volunteers are a cross section of Washington residents. They represent all religious groups, and they have varied backgrounds. Their occupations range from university professor to farmer, from officer in the Armed Forces to musician, from engineer to newspaper correspondent, and from physician to astronomer. They are on the boards of social agencies and service clubs; they belong to the League of Women Voters, to church choirs, and to other groups.

The volunteers meet the newly arrived trainees at trains and planes, offer hospitality to those who wish to visit an American home and meet an American family, arrange concerts and various entertainments at the center, and schedule many of their special appointments. Supplementing these two groups are lec-

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turers who explain the United States to the trainees in terms of its geography, government, health, education, welfare, customs, economic problems, foreign policy, and civil liberties, and the place of religion in American life.

The Program in Operation

A dual program has been worked out by the Center. One part consists of lectures and discussions on selected topics; the other part includes informal meetings and talks, hospitality arranged in American homes, and the supplying of special information.

The lectures are an undertaking in adult education at a high level. Because some of the visitors do not understand English, simultaneous translations are made, and the group may be listening to the lecturer in as many as five languages. Questions and comments from the visitors who do not speak English are relayed through an interpreter to the lecturer and to the entire group in English and, as necessary, through other interpreters.

The group in any one lecture session may have as few as 20 and as many as 60 or more persons (though the number is held as near 20 as possible) from as many as 18 countries—from Europe and Latin America, from the Near East and the Far East, from Africa and Australia.

The background and interests represented are as varied as the countries of origin. In one group, for example, may appear the Buddhist priest who was spiritual adviser to the King of Cambodia, the labor leader from the textile factory in Italy, the superintendent of a children's institution in Denmark, the social security official from Egypt. This diversity of technical background is kept in mind by the lecturer in his selection of the facts and concepts that are basic to the topic assigned. The staff is aware of the importance of giving the trainees a feeling of how the various fields are interrelated and how one technical specialty may depend on others.

The presentation of welfare services includes a description of the attitudes that have resulted in the social welfare programs as they are known in

the United States today. The lecturer summarizes the history of the voluntary agencies, their growth, and the emergence of cooperative efforts in community planning and support; the meeting of public welfare responsibilities by the Federal, State, and local governments; the growth of the public income-maintenance programs—especially the social insurance programs—as a means of protecting the family against certain common risks. The value of prevention, rather than cure, is also discussed, as well as the importance to the entire population of the health and welfare of each member of each family, the interdependence of family standards of living and the economic health of the Nation, and the provision of educational opportunities.

The questions that come from the group may be broad. "Are the welfare services a result of the country's concern for the spiritual value of the individual, or for the economic value of the individual?" "How do voluntary agencies and public agencies plan together in any community, and in the entire country?" "What services are available for unmarried mothers?" "What do you do for 'beggars'?"

On the other hand, the questions may be specific. "May a worker continue to work in covered employment after he reaches age 65?" "Does the local credit union receive any support from the Bureau of Federal Credit Unions?" "At what age may children leave school in order to work?" "Must a person who has received public assistance pay it back if his situation improves?"

The questions vary from country to country as well as from person to person. The lecturer knows some of the problems in most of the countries and therefore relates the reply to the situation that may prompt the query. To the question raised, for example, by someone from the Philippines about the wisdom of abandoning the community chest idea when it is not successful in raising adequate funds, the reply must be related, if possible, to the situation in the questioner's home country. The question from a German leader regarding the adequacy

of a 2-percent employee contribution to old-age and survivors insurance must be related to the differences between the German program and that of the United States.

Frequently members of the group ask for appointments with staff members of the Social Security Administration in order to secure additional information in a specific area of their interest—for example, standards of living, medical social work in public assistance programs, maternal and child health, and credit union policy.

In the lecture on the geography of the United States, the trainees are told of the distances between parts of the country that they will be visiting, the range in temperature, and the variety in agricultural crops and in industrial plants. The speaker emphasizes that size and diversity are characteristic of the geography of this country.

The lecture on United States foreign policy is always of great interest to the group. The speaker outlines internal factors that influence policy; procedures in external policy-making and the part played by various Government Departments; and some criteria for evaluating the foreign policy of a nation.

The picture of religion in American life is presented by members of each of the three large religious groups—Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. Representatives from the Jewish Community Council, the Washington Federation of Churches, and the National Catholic Welfare Conference explain the scope of their work in the community in relation to education, social welfare, economic and political affairs, and family life.

Similar presentations are made in lectures and discussions regarding social change, the organization of government at various levels, education, and civil liberties.

The informal side of the orientation program is composed of many parts. There are sightseeing trips to selected Government buildings and national shrines in and around Washington. There is usually a half-day visit to a high school, and sometimes visits to business offices, stores, and perhaps county fairs.

The evening programs are particularly interesting to the international group, as well as to hundreds of United States volunteers who come to the Center to participate in concerts, to teach and take part in square dances, to discuss television shows, to play pingpong or chess with the visitors, or to discuss informally the affairs of the world. The visitor experiences the freedom of open discussion and the stimulation of an exchange of ideas that are both like and unlike his own.

Every evening many of the international visitors are invited to American homes, where they see the way Americans live, the way the parents and children work together, the way a family plans together to entertain a guest from another land.

Evaluation

Like all responsible bodies, the Washington International Center continually measures what it is accomplishing against what it is trying to do—meeting within 5 days the orientation needs of so large and so varied a clientele. An Advisory Committee on Policy meets quarterly.

In addition, experts have been appointed to study the operations of the Center and to make an evaluation of the achievement of stated objectives. A continuing study is being made of the attitudes, and of the factors affecting the attitudes, of the international trainees.

Program for Social Welfare Trainees

Orientation

Just as planned orientation to the host country has been accepted everywhere as a vital part of training in the international field, so orientation to the particular technical field of the trainee's competence is generally recognized as an essential step in his program. The International Service of the Social Security Administration participates in this type of orientation of the international social service trainee to welfare services in the United States by providing a 1-week program that follows the week offered at the Washington International Center.

Each visitor's program is directed by a program advisor, chosen because of competence in the trainee's field of interest. Other technical experts in the Social Security Administration—experts in family and child welfare, in public assistance, in the social insurances, and in credit cooperatives—join in the work and planning for the trainees.

The program begins with an introduction to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, a brief description of the areas of responsibility carried by each part of the Department, and a statement on the reason the Social Security Administration has been selected as the agency of Government to plan this technical training program. Often a visit is arranged to the Voice of America—the foreign broadcasting unit of the U.S. Information Agency, which is housed in the same building as the Department—with an appointment for the trainee at his own country's "desk."

This is the time the trainee has conferences with his program advisor, during which they explore together the objectives of the overall program and the details of the plan by which these objectives may be achieved. It is an opportunity to consider together the requirements of the trainee's job at home and the developments in social welfare there that led to his selection for training in the United States. Even more important, it is the beginning of a working relationship between trainee and advisor that must carry through the entire training period and help relieve him of any uncertainties about arrangements or anxieties about progress that would otherwise interfere with his learning. It is also the time when the trainee learns about the social work methods used in the United States, hears expressed in many ways professional attitudes toward social problems, and feels the freedom of relating and questioning that is an essential part of professional learning. Conferences are arranged with selected experts in the trainee's specialty, within the International Service and the various Bureaus of the Social Security Administration.

One day is spent in considering the public and voluntary social services for families, which are based on the philosophy that social services should be provided to families in their own homes, with the emphasis on keeping the family together whenever possible. There is a review of the development of government responsibility in meeting the needs of families, as illustrated by the public assistance program and its provisions relating to the rights and needs of the individuals and safeguards relating to effective agency operation. The responsibility of the Bureau of Public Assistance for this Federal-State program is explained, as well as the way State and local agencies administer the program in meeting the needs of families and individuals and the way in which public and voluntary social agencies cooperate in every community. A film is usually shown that illustrates the services offered by a public welfare agency in a Western State. Occasionally a film showing the family counseling services offered by a voluntary family agency is used.

The discussion of services for children usually begins with an exchange of information regarding children and family life in the various countries represented. Problems relating to children and solutions that have been or may be developed are considered. The discussion leader, a staff member of the Children's Bureau, then summarizes briefly the development of services for children in the United States and the history of the Children's Bureau. There follows a description of the present structure and programs of the Bureau, its way of working with the States, and its relation to services for children in local public and private agencies. The group members raise questions on the basis of their interests; thus the discussions vary according to the countries represented and the special interests of the group members. For those persons who wish further individual discussions regarding specific areas in the field, appointments are made with the appropriate specialist in the Children's Bureau.

Another day is devoted to study of the social insurance programs as

methods of maintaining income for workers and their families when normal earnings are cut off by unemployment, disablement, illness, old age, or death. The principles of insurance, as distinguished from assistance, are brought out. The group considers how the philosophy of the American workers and the traditions of Federal-State relations have molded the forms of the social insurance programs in the United States. A brief presentation of workmen's compensation and unemployment insurance is followed by a more detailed discussion of old-age and survivors insurance. A comparison is then drawn between those programs and the protection provided for workers in the trainee's home country. A short film showing a retired worker applying for old-age and survivors insurance benefits is sometimes used, and occasionally a visit is made to a local old-age and survivors insurance office or to an unemployment insurance office.

The discussion of credit cooperatives, illustrated in the operations of the Federal credit unions, always stimulates interest. The group sees that the social values in cooperatives are equally as important as the economic values. They recognize, too, the relationship of the credit cooperative movement to the overall economic development of a country. They discuss the role of Government in ensuring sound practice. The expert outlines some guides that may be helpful in developing credit cooperatives in the home country.

During this week the trainee has had an opportunity to develop with his program advisor the details of his entire training program. Some plans that have been tentatively established are confirmed, and new possibilities are explored. The visitor gains increased confidence in his use of English and his ability to get along in a strange country.

Observation Program

The trainee's 2 weeks of orientation in Washington are followed by his first period of actual observation of programs in an American community. The Social Security Admin-

istration, working with eight communities, has developed a plan under which the communities accept groups of 2-5 trainees to observe for 2 weeks the operation of social services in the locality. The cooperating communities are Baltimore (Maryland); Wilmington (Delaware); Richmond, Winchester, and Norfolk (Virginia); Harrisburg, Reading, and West Chester (Pennsylvania); Martinsburg, (West Virginia); and Westchester County (New York).

This is the trainee's first glimpse of the way an American community meets its overall needs for welfare services. Under the guidance and supervision of an experienced social welfare leader, he sees social services brought into appropriate perspective to the needs of individuals and families.

The trainees welcome this opportunity to have a general look at a community in its everyday activities. They visit social and health agencies, both public and private, and such community facilities as hospitals, clinics, schools, courts, and institutions. Sometimes they visit a farm, a retail store, or a factory, and they attend churches of their choice. They are guests at meetings of civic clubs, such as Rotary or Kiwanis, at board meetings, and at any civic event that seems of special interest. Local agency board members assist the trainees to learn about the function of volunteer boards in the United States, the development of agency programs through staff and committee discussions, and the relation of public and voluntary welfare services. They have as a guide an experienced social welfare leader, who interprets the programs of the agencies, regional customs and group attitudes, and the problems on which the community is currently at work. Residents in these localities have been generous in offering hospitality to the trainees, and the evenings spent in the homes of American families are as meaningful to the international guest as they are pleasant and informative to the American host.

The visitors return to Washington and to the Social Security Administration for group discussions and

evaluations of their experience. Most of them are pleased with their introduction to the towns and people of the United States and gratified by the friendliness that they have met. They are delighted, too, to know that American life is not like some of the movies they have seen. They talk about the health, welfare, and education programs they have seen, interspersing their remarks with comments beginning "in our country . . ." They also observe any unevenness of services as well as any gaps in meeting social needs, and they ask the reason for such faults and lacks.

In Washington each member of the group talks again with his program advisor and has an opportunity to clarify further his special interest on the basis of a more realistic view of social services in this country.

Conclusion

Program planning before and during the trainee's period of study uses fully all the technical resources of the Social Security Administration. The staff of the International Service consults at each step of the way the appropriate Bureau expert or regional staff member on the best local agency resources to be used and the availability of those resources.

The experience of the program has been enough to prove that the learning opportunities for the trainees must be selective, with each experience having substantial content, each related to other experiences, and all in reasonable sequence. In the early planning with the trainee, therefore, and throughout the entire training program the program advisor relates appointments with individuals and agencies to the overall plan. Thus each session with a technical expert has maximum usefulness to the participant and is directly related to the central theme.

A trainee may spend 2 or 3 months in the United States, or he may spend a year or more. Whatever the length of stay or the focus of interest, most visitors have considered their weeks in the orientation program as among the most helpful and useful of their entire stay.