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EUROPEAN YOUTH CENTRE

STUDY SESSION held in co-operation with
the EUROPEAN AREA COMMITTEE of the
WORLD ALLIANCE OF YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN
ASSOCIATIONS.

14 - 21 JANUARY 1976

THEME: THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION IN LEADERSHIP

R E P O R T

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of the seminar was to provide an opportunity for the study of the European dimension in leadership within the YMCA, and to come to a clearer understanding of International, National and Local Communications within the movement and in associations with other agencies.

AIMS OF THE SEMINAR

- a. To provide a meeting place for ideas common to those who work within the framework of the YMCA in Europe.
- b. To offer an opportunity to listen to those most closely involved in:-
the Council of Europe
the Church in Europe
the United Nations.
- c. To take an objective look at the many facets of communications, particularly as the subject relates to the work of the YMCA in Europe.
- d. To study, in groups, various methods of work and approach to the problems facing the YMCA in Europe today.
- e. To stimulate active participation on the part of leaders and staff in order to reach a clear understanding of the function of the YMCA in Europe today.

THE WORK PATTERN

The seminar had three main methods of operation:

- a. LECTURE SESSIONS
- b. GROUP WORK ON COMMUNICATIONS
- c. GROUP WORK ON INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMING

OPENING SESSION

In welcoming the participants to Strasbourg, Mr Egon Slopianka, European Area Secretary, YMCA, stressed the importance of the seminar, not only for those present, but for the whole movement throughout Europe.

There is a problem of communication. There is a slow development of the European ideal and it was important to see again, the rise of national feelings in many parts of Europe.

Europe MUST happen and it CAN happen and movements like the YMCA have an important role to play in stimulating the members to an awareness of the needs of individuals as well as to those of whole communities.

It was no longer enough to go on talking about communications. It had to be practised in every possible way and the YMCA offered the opportunity for real communication between people.

Throughout the coming week, there would be many opportunities to listen, to share, to express views and to communicate with each other, but this should be seen as only the beginning of a new venture into the European dimension. The work started in Strasbourg must be carried back to the national movements, and through each body to the local associations and through the local work to every member.

There would be an opportunity to listen to people whose task in the world was to communicate ideas, stimulate enthusiasm and speak for others.

There would be an opportunity for the participants to work in groups, learning to share and to communicate individual ideas and there would be an opportunity to face the reality of Europe ... in Strasbourg and every participant had the chance to study, to learn, to participate, to share in the experience of being a community.

YOUTH IN EUROPE

Jack Zapasnik,
Council of Europe,
Youth Centre.

YOUTH is a category ... used by sociologists.

YOUTH is a dynamic part of society.

Why has YOUTH become the subject of so much discussion throughout Europe today? The 15 to 24 age-group takes up a huge part of any national community and they become the subject for reports, trade, work, debate and criticism.

In the UK, 10.5 million young people form part of a community of 55 million.

Youth has become a threat to many and a challenge to others and it is in this kind of setting that many youth organisations, including the YMCA have to function.

There are many international organisations dealing with youth, some political, industrial, religious, social and others made up of one-interest groups, but each one provides a vital opportunity for young people to express themselves.

Internationalism and international organisations are a fact. There is now no longer such a thing as independent nations. Each is interdependent and the young people within the various nations in Europe are dependent on each other.

More and more European youth movements now want to speak about the problems of society. For many, the problems are real. There is a sense of urgency as they talk about a New Society or the formation of new systems within Europe.

It is interesting to note that most youth organisations operating in Europe today are the product of the 20th century and each is saying something important to Europe.

There are many problems to be overcome ... yet where do these problems lie and can this seminar make an attempt to understand the need for flexibility, for movement and for outreach?

OPEN DISCUSSION

Some interesting discussion took place following this stimulating and searching session, with many of the major points being taken into the group for closer study.

THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Mr B Jacobson
Director of Education
and Cultural Affairs
Council of Europe

In introducing his subject, Mr Jacobson spoke of the days before the 1939-45 World War, when Europe was in conflict and had very little sense of unity or union.

Even during the war a number of people had a vision of a United States of Europe but the circumstances at that time obviously prevented any further development of this idea.

Since 1945, and the birth of the Council of Europe, more and more people are dedicated to the European ideal.

The Council of Europe Assembly has become the meeting place of ideas and today, despite the many problems, there is greater unity between the member nations than at any time in history.

By setting up international institutions, by drawing together peoples from many backgrounds, by sharing in cultural and educational exchanges, the Council of Europe is playing a vital role in developing a concept of unity of purpose.

OPEN DISCUSSION

Participants showed considerable interest in this session and many of the questions which followed indicated a desire to know more about the working of the Council of Europe and its influence on the European Community of Nations.

A number of searching questions regarding the Council of Europe bureaucracy were raised and whilst the answers were not very convincing, they did at least show that there was an understanding of the problem.

Participants took a number of other questions back to their groups for further discussion and analysis.

EUROPE AND THE UNITED NATIONS

Addressing the participants, the speaker said that the membership of the United Nations had tripled in over 30 years of operation. Europe was now playing a minority role, but nevertheless, that role, whilst it had changed, was important and extremely influential.

Many new problems had arisen in recent years and it was important to Europe that it realised that these changes were taking place in order that it could react in ways which would bring greater benefit to its people.

There are five geographical groups at work within the United Nations and two other functional groupings:
(1) the developing countries and (2) the non-aligned countries.

There are many inter-group discussions.

Europe is represented on the Security Council and within the General Assembly and it was noticeable that the European countries tended to vote for the things they knew they could live up to in practical politics. It was increasingly difficult for some European countries to act as a "loyal opposition".

Over the years, the United Nations had been through many experiences:

- the Cold War era;
- the North/South era;
- the Economic era.

Today, the world is living in the New Economic Order and the future of the world depends on a full understanding of the economic situation. The basic injustice of the world will be overcome when the developing countries have free access to the European markets.

HUMAN RIGHTS

The Council of Europe has played an important role in the field of human rights and the United Nations, working in close liaison, has shared this ideal.

Europe has much to contribute to this field and Europeans are seen as the guardians of proper proceedings in the United Nations. The United Nations is the debating chamber of the world.

OPEN DISCUSSION

Following this inspiring introduction, participants were quick to fire questions relating to the relationships between the United Nations and their own countries.

PLENARY SESSIONTHE YMCA IN EUROPEOPEN QUESTION TIME

Encouraged by the European Area Secretary, participants were invited to bring to the plenary session a number of questions which had a direct bearing on the work of the YMCA in Europe today.

1. In what practical ways does the European Area Committee of the YMCA help countries such as ITALY, GREECE, SPAIN, PORTUGAL, TURKEY?
2. Is there a need for national ambassadors, appointed by the European Area Committee, to travel from country to country within Europe in order to communicate ideas?
3. Is it possible for the European Area Committee to organise more European seminars in Southern Europe?
4. What are the AIMS of the different national movements of the YMCA in Europe and is it possible to publish these aims and have them circulated to all European countries?
5. Do we really need an "organised" European YMCA?
6. What is the real relationship between the YMCA and the YWCA in Europe today and is it not now an issue of international significance at a time when unity of purpose occupies so much time and attention at international events?
7. What is the possibility of a deeper and closer contact with the YWCA in Europe today?
8. Can the European Area Committee make it possible for the stronger national movements to help the weaker members?
9. What is the possibility of developing more professional and voluntary workers' seminars within the YMCA in Europe?
10. Is there not now a real need for a European leadership training policy?

In replying to these questions, the European Area Secretary first thanked the participants for the thought-provoking points and then took time to spell out the priorities of the European Area Committee.

Much had been done since the formation of this relatively new group, but it was readily recognised that much remains to be done.

Greater co-operation from national movements would help and there was some indication that this was already happening.

The great challenge to the YMCA in Europe today is the question of the southern countries. It should be remembered more often, that they are part of the Family of Nations which go to make up the YMCA in Europe and that all countries have a responsibility to understand their unique problems and to assist wherever possible.

On the question concerning national movements, the point was made that more time should be taken to spell out the needs of each national movement and to share those needs with others. It was sad that some national movements were deeply involved in European experiences, so learning to share and to gain from their activities, whilst others took little or no part in seminars, conferences, camps, and this was often a reflection of their own insecurity or lack of interest. Much remains to be done in this field.

Whilst it would be encouraging to have a form of European leadership training in the YMCA it was felt that much remained to be done to stimulate a genuine desire for this development to take place. Steps were being taken to provide the enthusiasm for ideas like this and participants at this seminar were living proof of the possibilities.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Participants, stimulated by the session, brought forward many other questions, in particular those related to the role of the YMCA in a changing Europe.

REPORTS FROM THE NATIONS

Following the previous session on the YMCA in Europe, participants were invited to make a short statement on what they saw as being the area of greatest need within their own national movement:

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| <u>GREECE</u> | - The development of a social programme, based on the Christian faith. |
| <u>ITALY</u> | - The development of the Christian spirit among the people. |
| <u>PORTUGAL</u> | - The development of special camp projects for young refugees. |
| <u>SWITZERLAND</u> | - To work on the Paris basis and to make it more meaningful to members. |
| <u>GERMANY</u> | - To "connect" people with Jesus and to this end, provide a comprehensive programme. |
| <u>BELGIUM</u> | - To rebuild the YMCA throughout Belgium. |
| <u>HOLLAND</u> | - To translate the Paris basis, in practical terms throughout the country. |
| <u>SCOTLAND</u> | - To offer young people the Christian alternative to government services and those of other agencies. |
| <u>DENMARK</u> | - To develop as a church organisation and to win young people for God. |
| <u>NORWAY</u> | - To develop the relationship with the Church and continue the programme of outreach. |
| <u>SWEDEN</u> | - To develop programmes of international culture and sport. |

The statements above are highly personal to the individuals who made them and do not necessarily represent the official views of the national movements concerned. Nevertheless, they serve as an indication of the feelings being expressed within many national movements and as such, they are important.

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PLENARY SESSION

THE EUROPEAN YMCA

The need for European understanding between the national movements is of paramount importance. The informal discussions throughout the seminar showed that many important issues remained unanswered.

Questions raised in some of the group sessions had suggested the YMCA which operates in Northern Europe was considerably different to the movement operating in the South of Europe. There was a need to establish a fresh confidence in the minds of the Southern Europeans and to encourage them to know that the work they are doing is important and necessary. There ARE different priorities for different countries and every national movement will react to these priorities as it sees best.

What is so special about the YMCA that it must be the same in every country anyway?

Many questions were raised about the need for a "European YMCA". Europe is a geographical fact and each country has its own movement, with its own policy and its own programme. As the work in each country has developed, the need for international exchange of ideas has become more obvious. The European YMCA now has a unique place in the world movement.

Today, the theme "The Europe of the YMCAs" is becoming more and more important. The dimension of being European is a new and exciting development within the movement, as well as throughout the rest of the community of nations.

There is a great need to strengthen the FAMILY ATMOSPHERE within the movement. We say we are a Christian movement, a fellowship, therefore we cannot enter into bloc politics simply to promote the idea of Europe at the expense of others. The YMCA is also an international movement, and every member of the family is important.

Has the YMCA any part to play in the politics of Europe? What contribution can the movement make to a united Europe? In many national movements there is already evidence of co-operation with other European agencies, through national and international youth councils and committees, but the adventure must take the YMCA out into new fields of opportunity which daily open up.

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Within the Council of Europe, the YMCA has an important voice on a number of committees and through its contacts with individuals.

Close contact is being maintained with the YWCA. Information is shared. It is however, important to understand the international structure of both movements. In the YMCA, the structure starts with the local association and works through to world level. The YWCA tends to lead from the top ... nevertheless, there is a good working relationship between the two movements. There have been many talks at local, national and international level about closer co-operation.

Suggestions concerning future European seminars that might involve the YWCA were discussed at some length and many participants felt there was now a real need for an international statement of policy on the role and function of both movements in Europe today.

On too many occasions there is public and governmental confusion on the role of two international movements, with similar names, doing similar work, yet asking for a separate identity, separate funds and a separate policy. Many participants felt the time had come to put this house in order, then and only then, could the united movements speak with any real acceptance about European unity or world unity.

THE "C" IN THE YMCA

What does it mean to be an ecumenical movement in Europe today? What does it mean in terms of objectives, programme and policies? How does the YMCA define its Christian mission?

The YMCA has an opportunity to translate its message, in simple terms, to all nations. It was equally important for the movement as a whole, to constantly renew its understanding of the Christian faith.

To discuss the "C" in isolation from other factors is dangerous. The movement has a job of work to do and the "C" is important, but it is equally important to see how the "C" can be translated into positive, constructive action throughout Europe.

The movement must listen to what GOD is saying to it today. Far too many "people" are telling GOD how the YMCA should be run, with all the consequent disasters that that can bring about. Living with a living God means to witness to the JOY OF CHRISTIAN LIVING and it is in this role that the YMCA in Europe must find itself again.

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THE YMCA OF EUROPE

Egon Slopianka,
European Area Secretary,
YMCA.

It is a mistake to put labels on national movements. Sometimes the national movements are responsible for the labels they place on themselves. Some have the label of Christian Evangelical ... which suggests that other movements are not!!! This attitude undermines the spirit of the movement.

The diversity of gifts should be recognised. What does it really mean to be a "family of the YMCAs" in Europe today? Some national movements are very European and have a real and active concern for other members of the family. Others are not interested in the family and tend to stay away from family gatherings.

The concept of the family of YMCAs means a recognition that each national movement has different skills and talents to share. Each family has individuals who make up the membership and all are different, but all part of the same family. NONE is better than the other, each has a part to play.

Each national movements has a part to play and a contribution to make in understanding the Christian ideal.

There are two areas where it is possible to come to some agreement:

1. The MAN who founded the Church.

All national movements can agree that Jesus is the centre of the life of the movement. The PERSON OF JESUS is important to all national movements.

2. A MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE ... FOR PEOPLE.

The future of Europe depends on the recognition of the vertical and horizontal position of the Cross.

The movement is concerned with God ... and with the people of God ... the Laos ... the Laity.

The YMCA has no other commission but to SERVE.

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Any study of the PARIS BASIS would reveal three important words:

- a. UNITE
- b. DISCIPLES
- c. KINGDOM

The YMCA is a movement of obedience in faith.

JESUS SAID:

"That they all may be one".

Unity in faith means that we must accept the situation as it is and with the help of the Living Lord, go out into a world which needs His Love and our service.

If the YMCA believes that Christ is the LIVING LORD, then WE must be aware of what this means in practical terms. Unity must be lived. Our unity must be tested. This unity must be experienced by people. Europe in action is learning to live together.

What do we want to achieve? What does the YMCA want to achieve? We need a clear vision of the goals and a determination to reach the goals, without constant reference to more and more committees, statements, policies. There is a job to be done, we have the WAY set before us.

Christ is the MAN who unites. Christ can break the international barriers.

Today, the young people in and out of the YMCA are facing great problems. Where are the people who care? Or has the YMCA settled down to become a middle-class organisation, comfortable, settled.

How quickly is the movement prepared to internationalise the local and national associations? Without this feeling of urgency, there will be little hope for a united Europe or a united YMCA.

Today, as never before, the movement is on the threshold of new opportunities, but it must now be alive to each one, set its sights on the things it can do well, and do them so well that it will want to tackle new fields, in new ways, with new people.

"What for you will be the European YMCA of tomorrow?"

GROUP REPORTS

THE "C" IN THE YMCA

GROUP 1

The group felt more optimistic at the end of the seminar. The problem of training and education was tackled and the aim and purpose of the three national training colleges (YMCA) was considered to be a subject of the utmost priority.

The group felt there were two groups of leaders working in the YMCA. Those who had a theological back-ground or training and those who did not. There were times when this difference was more obvious than others and the group felt this was a matter for further consideration at some future seminar.

GROUP 2

It was difficult to reach any definite conclusions about the subject. In some national movements it was difficult to see any evidence of the "C" in the operation.

The group discussed the difference in attitude to the subject between the North and South Europeans.

GROUP 3

This group did not reach any firm conclusions about the subject, but there had been a most fruitful and enlightening discussion which the participants felt would take up too much time to report in complete detail. It had been a refreshing and stimulating experience and although there were many differences of opinion as to how the "C" should be expressed, the group were united in accepting that not only should the "C" be in the title, but that every effort should be made to make this aspect of the objective much more clearly stated, both in academic and practical terms.

NOTE:

Relating the various experiences felt in the groups on this subject is clearly extremely difficult. Lines of communication were cleared, expressions of opinion varied from the strictly evangelical to the non-committed, but each was expressed with consideration and general concern for the future of the movement in Europe.

Report of work group on communication

The three groups created on the third day formed an integral part of the seminar and had as an overall aim the involvement of the participants in educational methods to develop leadership potential.

The group for which I was responsible had the following two aims that were accepted by the group during its first session:

- to gain awareness of the international dimension of leadership
- to consider personal involvement in a youth organisation and view its international implications.

The group began with an input proposing the aims and the working method. It was stressed in the introduction and was ratified after a certain time by the group that the responsibility for the group lay with all its members. The role of the staff person would be one of a facilitator and active member of the group.

The group spent four sessions together. The first dealt with the following questions:

What is my motivation in youth work?

Explain some of your experiences: joys and difficulties.

How is internationalism relevant to my youth work?

The group members spoke personally of their work, identifying their motivation, their values, and exchanging examples of life situations that they have experienced in their work with the YMCA. Their level of experience in the YMCA as such varied a great deal and at times it was necessary to clarify at length a particular point of view. Language problems were minimal, as most of the members spoke and understood English well. The discussion speed of the group was dictated by the group itself, conscious of communication difficulties.

A session was used for a simulated role play in a local YMCA faced with a series of problems. The members of the group played the role of staff persons (Chairman of the Board, Secretary General, Sports Director, community workers and a staff person responsible for christian emphasis of the programme). The problems the "staff" was confronted with were threefold:

- a. financial relations with the local authority and maximal use of facilities;
- b. invited co-operation with the church;
- c. adverse publicity concerning the restricted use of the YMCA buildings in a city with an important immigrant population.

The short simulation game served the purpose of highlighting both organisational and ideological problems facing professionals working on a local level.

The group went on to discuss communication, leadership, and finally christian leadership and open membership.

An evaluation by the group of its own work showed that all the members felt that the experience had been profitable, the personal experience phase of discussing motivation and values broke down any barriers that could have existed previously and much was learnt.

The group agreed that the educational methods that were introduced into the three groups should have been explicitly presented to the plenary beforehand to enable the participants of the seminar to choose consciously the type of work group they intended to participate in.

GROUP EVALUATION SESSIONGROUP 1

The group evaluation was very positive. There was a feeling that there had been clear objectives. Some of the initial input seemed, at first, to be outside the reality of many of the participants, but later discussion showed the validity of the lectures.

There was nothing which the group wanted to raise which was not positive, although they suggested that some aspects of the organisation might be looked at again.

The group felt the devotional periods had been important.

GROUP 2

Basically this group enjoyed the experience of making the discovery afresh that they were Europeans!!!

PROGRAMME : There was a feeling that the input sessions could have been more evenly distributed throughout the week.

FREE TIME : There was a feeling there had been too much free time.

CHANGES : There had been too many changes to the printed programme and this was particularly disappointing when it came to the evening arrangements or visits to various places which for the most part, did not take place.

PREPARATION : The group felt that the preparation for the seminar had not been as thorough as it might have been. Many participants came completely unprepared.

PARTICIPATION: There was a feeling that the participants should have been selected with greater care. It was realised that this is the responsibility of the national movements.

GROUP 3

This group discussed the European situation and the reality of Europe was found in the group.

A small number of language problems had to be overcome, but time was taken to ensure that members understood what was taking place.

By living and working together, the group had found a new understanding of each other and of the backgrounds from which they came.

The group felt that a number of preparation papers should have been circulated in readiness for the seminar.

There was an expression of regret that a number of expected social visits or educational visits had not taken place.

THANKS

The European Area Secretary took the opportunity to thank the participants for an excellent week.

There had been genuine discussion about genuine matters.

Thanks were expressed to the Council of Europe for providing the facilities and to those within the Youth Centre who had worked in the background to make the operation run smoothly.

A special word of thanks was expressed to the interpreters who had not only carried out their work with efficiency, but had joined in the atmosphere of the occasion, enriching it with their ability and enthusiasm.

A word of thanks was expressed to the staff group who had tried to unite the seminar, help in the operation and generally be available to those who needed advice and counsel.

There was a generous vote of thanks for Mr Slopianka, the European Area Secretary, for all his work and vision, with the expression that he would continue to be the inspiration behind so many worthwhile projects taking place throughout the YMCA in Europe.

STAFF EVALUATION

Ken Mathers,
Secretary for
Training and
Education,
Scottish National
Council of YMCAs.

PRE-SEMINAR PREPARATIONS

Without question, this was one of the most important aspects of the 1976 seminar. The staff group met to plan an outline of the programme, to work out some clear direction as far as organisation was concerned and to come to an even closer personal relationship with each other. This preparation paid off in many ways and it was clear the participants felt that the staff had a good working relationship.

DAY TO DAY MEETINGS

The informality of the day-to-day meetings gave an opportunity for free expression and where necessary this was translated into the programme and into the feeling of at-oneness which developed as each day passed.

GROUP WORK

On the communications side, the group work was very well worth doing. A few basic language difficulties had to be overcome and quite a number of North/South attitudes had to be understood by every member of the group ... including the group leader. It was a most interesting and stimulating week in the group and participants not only worked well together, but experienced a real sense of the European dimension.

ORGANISATION

As with every international or national experience, it is possible to learn many new lessons. This seminar was no exception. A little more thought should have gone into the preparation of the evening periods when visits were programmed but did not take place. A particular disappointment was the non-visit to a Youth Centre in Strasbourg.

FINAL COMMENT

A great learning experience as well as a sharing experience, working with a fine team, good participants, clear objectives (not always reached ... but attempted) and a fine YMCA spirit of endeavour and purpose.

STAFF EVALUATION

Fritz Mast,
Regional Secretary,
YMCA,
Germany.

1. THE TEAM

Much more co-operation possible this year. We knew one another better and had an understanding of our roles, techniques as well as talents. There was more openness and freedom to exchange views.

2. THE AIMS

We were able to achieve them, except for the working groups.

3. GENERAL REMARKS

There should still be more emphasis on the recruitment of participants.

In Strasbourg we should try to stick to an international topic, "INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP".

The dates for the next seminar should be fixed at once.

Egon Slopianka,
European Area Secretary,
YMCA.

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