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THANKS TO THE SUMMER CAMP "DE VLAM"

BY KLAUS MANN

In Amsterdam, the air was heavy. Of course, it was good to be once more in this city, whose hospitality I had enjoyed during the first years of the Hitler regime, from 1933 to 1936, and to witness its vigorous, active life, its surprisingly fast recovery from the cruel tribulations of the recent past. But somehow the ~~charm~~ charm of those familiar streets and "grachts" seemed to pall on me, that particular morning. Was it only on account of the stifling heat? Or was my depression caused by the news I had just heard on the radio? A "police action" in Indonesia...: It sounded ominous, disquieting. The papers carried headlines about air raids, machine-gun strafing. It was enough of a shock to mar the most radiant summer day...

I was pleased when my friend Jef Last called me up and suggested that I spend a couple of days with him in the summer camp "De Vlam," near Ommen. "A brilliant idea," I said. "I've never seen such a camp before. It will be an interesting experience."

It turned to be more than that. If I was in rather a gloomy mood at the time I left town, I found myself cheered-up, comforted, reassured after a few hours out there, in the woods, on the river.

Not that I forgot all about the tragedy of Java! If I had been inclined to do so, Jef Last himself would have prevented me: A short speech he delivered to the community of the camp stressed and elucidated the gravity of the situation. But even while remaining fully aware of those grim and challenging problems, I overcame my apprehension and despondency. The contact with so much healthy and upright youth could not but have an encouraging, refreshing effect on me.

Yes, it was good to see those hard-working, brave young Socialists enjoying their well-deserved vacations in such ideal surroundings,

to take part in their games and conversations, to make friends with them. Many of those I met have suffered for their convictions, as did, for instance, the camp leader, Tom Rot, who spent years in German captivity. There were young men whose bodies still showed the marks of torture inflicted on them by Nazi sadism. But nowhere did I find signs of revengefulness or self-pity. The young people gathering around "De Vlam" seem to be ~~more~~ interested in the future, rather than the past; in reconstruction, rather than revenge.

The same men who, at the time of the German occupation, gave such impressive proofs of their militant patriotism, are now the first to remember and uphold the ideal of ^{universal} ~~international~~ solidarity. It is the ambition of the "Vlam" editors to make their summer camp ~~an international~~ an international meeting-place -- and in fact, even now quite a few foreigners find their way to the idyllic settlement, ~~near Ommen~~, notwithstanding the difficult transport situation in postwar Europe. There were fairly large groups from Belgium and Czechoslovakia, in addition to some friends from Sweden and Switzerland; also, I made the acquaintance of a veritable Egyptian and had the pleasure of meeting one of my countrymen, a student and radio correspondent from New York. Other guests, I was told, are expected from various parts of Europe.

It was a colorful, lively crowd that attended the morning lecture -- a very instructive speech by Mr. Soenito on "De vrijheidsbeweging in Indonesië" -- and which participated in the discussion of the afternoon. In the evening, the whole community assembled in the main tent to listen to Nel Oosthout's recital of "Saint Joan" -- an extraordinary performance in which one inspired and dynamic woman impersonates all the characters of G. B. Shaw's famous drama. Miss Oosthout has certainly experienced many triumphs, in this country and abroad; but nowhere could she find a more attentive, more responsive audience

than the one facing her in that crowded, primitive tent, last Friday night.

It was a memorable evening -- the climax and crown of a day that will remain unforgettable to me. Before falling asleep on my cot I told my tent-mate, Tom Rot, that I envied him his job. I am sure it's a lot of ~~work and~~ trouble, to run a summer camp of such dimensions -- and to run it as smoothly and efficiently as Tom manages to do, in his unassuming, casual manner. But as a fine recompense for his efforts he enjoys the friendship and gratitude of those he is working for -- including this transient visitor, who concludes his report with a deep-felt Thanks to the Summer Camp DE VLAM and its excellent leader!

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