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The Story Behind the

One of its "godfathers" tells what led to the plan which has



Peace Corps volunteers will soon join other American personnel abroad to help share U.S. know-how and resources. Above: in Jordan, a U.S. technician and two sheiks examine a lush carpet of grass where none grew before. Below: an Iranian girl is inoculated against disease.



Peace Corps

fired the imagination of American youth

By **REP. HENRY S. REUSS**

as told to Curtis Mitchell



Rep. Henry S. Reuss

Rep. Henry S. Reuss (D.-Wis.) has been called a "godfather" of the Peace Corps. Married in 1924, he has four children—reason enough for his determination to add a new dimension to our foreign activities. He first presented Peace Corps legislation to Congress in collaboration with the late Sen. Richard Neuberger of Oregon. Last year, it was his amendment to the Mutual Security Act that obtained funds for the study that demonstrated the Corps' usefulness. It was his activity in the House and that of Sen. Hubert Humphrey (D.-Minn.) in the Senate which attracted the support of President Kennedy. This is his story of how the Corps was born.

rows of cinder blocks. They were building the village's first school. Two were white-skinned, others black. The African breathed deeply; what he wanted to say did not come easily. White men had ravished his land of its gold, diamonds, ivory. Along the coast, 24 stone forts still stood where slave dealers had once imprisoned their captives until the slave ships came.

"We've never known white men who would work by our side," the African said. "After today, we shall bury the past and toil together in brotherhood."

These incidents only hint at the ultimate value of our new Corps. Because I was one of its godfathers, critics have called me a visionary. But they also have said, "Diplomacy is a man's work. How can kids succeed where diplomats fail?"

LET ME EXPLAIN:

In 1957, I visited Cambodia, one of a group of Congressmen investigating the use of our foreign-aid money. We were motor-ing along a magnificent highway built by American funds. Our guide said, "This road cost \$30 million to build."

"Who uses it?" I asked. We were passing between deserted, tangled fields.

He pointed at a barefooted Cambodian who was leading his water buffalo along the road's shoulder. Except for our car and that man, the road was empty mile after mile. The question asked itself:

How else might we have spent that money to serve more people?

A town in a remote valley gave me the answer. Four young Americans joined me at lunch and described their exciting work. They had been schoolteachers back home; now they were hurrying from one Cambodian village to another, starting schools for people who had suddenly gone mad for freedom and education. "So many villages

want us," they said, "and we are so few."

From that day to this, I have sought a way to enlist the know-how and energies of our young people in a Peace Corps. College students are eager to help, as both President Kennedy and I have learned.

But important questions emerge. Is the need genuine? Will young people be accepted by guest countries and given meaningful tasks to perform? Do our modern youths have the fortitude and know-how required by primitive conditions?

Several of us who believed in the Peace Corps turned to the experience of private organizations who have sent young Americans overseas for years—the Mennonites, Friends, Mormons, and other religious groups, for instance. In New York City, I discovered Operation Crossroads Africa, Inc., which has flown work-study groups of teen-agers to many African countries. In Washington, D.C., I learned about a project called International Voluntary Services. They showed me thick files of letters requesting help.

AT THE TOP of the list was teaching.

Two-thirds of the people of Asia, Africa, and Latin America are illiterate. Literacy is the first step toward self-government. Almost every new nation has begged us for teachers of English, home economics, and household arts.

Next, most new nations need more food. In Vietnam, rural families earn about \$50 a year. Their diet is mostly rice. Their life expectancy is 35 years.

Will our young ambassadors be accepted? The evidence is overwhelming that they will be. Each community moves toward friendship at its own pace, according to those who have worked in the field. An IVS worker in Cambodia was settling into his assignment when the provincial

(Continued)

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