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# Peace Corps shows gains

It's been just over 10 years since Congress, at President Kennedy's behest, formally established the Peace Corps "to help foreign countries meet their urgent needs for skilled manpower."

Today, in spite of a general US retreat from various military and economic commitments around the world, in spite of the current Senate shenanigans with the foreign aid bill, and in spite of an orgy of doubting our morals and motives abroad, the Peace Corps is alive and remarkably well.

Applications have risen by almost 40 percent this year and requests by foreign countries for volunteers are on the increase, too. Both are reversing four-year downward curves.

This turnaround, this resilience currently shown by the Peace Corps, suggests the fundamental merits of the concept. It indicates that it is not merely a glamorous gimmick of the '60s and the New Frontier to be discarded on the dustheap of broken American ideals. Yes, Virginia, there is a place in the world for volunteer service by the people of developed countries for the benefit of those that are developing.

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That's in the abstract. In the concrete, the modest resurgence of the Peace Corps is a credit to the redirection which has been brought about in the last few years by director Joseph Blatchford.

An energetic, former collegiate All-America tennis player, Blatchford first captured the public imagination as the man who was beamed by partner Spiro Agnew's wayward serve in a celebrated Washington tennis match several years ago.

The 36-year-old Blatchford weathered that indignity and has gone on to breathe new life into the volunteer organization which many people were beginning to view as an idea whose time had come—and gone.

Blatchford's contribution has been to set the Peace Corps in some notable "new directions." Contrary to Sargent Shriver's Corps of the early '60s, featuring phalanxes of Ivy-educated generalists floating the backwaters of the Nile or the Amazon on a postgraduate period abroad, the emphasis today is on experienced professionals fulfilling specific and often technical functions.

The Peace Corps—henceforth to be known as Action for its recent fusion with the domestic version Vista—is experimenting with all manner of volunteer service and servants now. This includes married couples serving as a team, and persons specially prepared through subsidized education at selected colleges (including the University of Massachusetts) for a year in-service domestically after college and then two years abroad.

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This is one instance in which the hard figures have responded to the soft theorizing about improving and updating. Where the Peace Corps had been steadily declining in both applications and selected volunteers from a peak of more than 10,000 five years ago, this trend has now been reversed.

Applications jumped from 19,000 during the period September, 1969, to August, 1970, to 26,500 in the same 12-month period just ended. As of last month, there were 8213 volunteers in 56 countries around the world.

No one is doing any real tub-thumping about this state of affairs. For Peace Corps officials are anxious to maintain a low posture around the world, free from all the bravado and braggadocio associated with the venture 10 years ago.

One place where this is especially so is Chile where the Peace Corps maintains a modest and apparently satisfactory operation, and is very adverse to calling attention to it.

Chile is a land where several years ago two Communist senators launched a full-scale congressional investigation of alleged Peace Corps involvement with the CIA in an attempt to get rid of the program altogether. These elements had reason to believe they had an ally in Allende, the first freely-elected Marxist president in the Western Hemisphere.

Just a year ago, in fact at the time of Allende's inauguration, some Washington officials in the State Department were proposing that the Peace Corps be withdrawn from Chile before it was thrown out.

Neither thing happened. Today there are some 62 men and women volunteers in the country, engaged primarily in forestry and fishery works and in the noteworthy fish meal concentrate program. Requests from Chilean government for 22 additional volunteers are now outstanding, and a number of these are now in training, including a winning college basketball coach (from Delaware U.), requested to prep the Chilean national team for the next Pan American games.

The future of the Peace Corp in Chile as elsewhere isn't fully secure. Officials hasten to point out that the welcome mat could be withdrawn at any time.

But the organization is demonstrating more durability there than many an American corporation, such as Anaconda Copper. It's proven itself sufficiently so that it won't sink or swim simply on the future won-lost record of Chile's national basketball team.

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