

American Friends Service Committee

20 South Twelfth Street



Philadelphia, Penna.

BULLETIN ON RELIEF IN FRANCE

Bulletin #1

For the Use of Editorial Comment and Re-publication

June 10, 1940

QUAKER WORKER REPORTS 3,550,000 REFUGEES IN FRANCE

2,500,000 French evacuees from the war zones--- 1,050,000 Dutch and Belgian refugees estimated by the French Government to have entered France since May 10, 1940 -- a staggering total of over three and an half million homeless, heartbroken human beings in desperate need of assistance -- this is the gigantic task faced by the workers in France of the American Friends Service Committee. Margaret Frawley, one of the Quaker representatives, describing her trip through Southern France, writes:

"As we drove toward Nimes early Sunday morning, we saw the vanguard of the Belgians -- crowded into anything that would roll, many in open vans, mattresses and blankets piled on the tops of the cabs, baby carriages and bicycles on front and on back. The mattresses were not only beds, but protections against air attack. How shall I describe to you their faces except as frozen as if the terror had numbed them - gray, tired, discouraged as they drove between green fields and thought of their own, abandoned; through quiet villages and remembered that their own were peaceful, too, a week ago. The desolation of a land they loved was in their faces.

"It was early morning, but the village people were up to meet them. In these cities and towns the men of fighting age are at the front, so it is the women, the old men, the boys who come. The Boy Scouts, freed from school, have done stalwart service. At 6 o'clock the village committees were at the edge of the town, to guide these weary travellers through the town, to lead them to reception centers for food and rest. All day and all night they came and all along the way they were being received. When one realized that this has been going on for five days and nights and still continues, one has some concept of what it is like.

"ALL DAY THEY CAME-----"

"Yesterday morning, heading North to Paris from Marseille, we again drove into the road of those sad, advancing caravans. All day they came. Then we began to meet French cars and as we identified the license plates, we knew that department after department in the North and West were being evacuated. It was like a panorama of new battlefields, the names we knew in 1914.

"Many of the Belgians we saw today were driving farm horses. The animals plodded on, footsore and with drooping heads. The carts were piled high with personal possessions, necessities and cherished bits; a child's doll, a gangling puppy, crates of chickens, little bundles of hay for the horses, an old clock. Odd buggies that probably have not been more than two miles

from home in long and useful service groaned under the weight of their crowded cargo.

".....A MAGNIFICENT JOB....."

"Tonight I have been to the reception center at Paris. Some 3000 to 4000 refugees find refuge here every night. There is food for all, clean beds and showers. It's a magnificent job of quick organization and many of the people who have staffed it have not slept in forty-eight hours. Outside the radio car swings round and round announcing children separated from their families.

"A VILLAGE OF CHILDREN....."

"Bombardments in the department of -----, an important metallurgical area, trapped 2000 children. With intensive daily bombardments over a period of two weeks, they were finally compelled to sleep in the refuges. A plan for rescuing them has now been worked out by the department officials and we are helping to finance the hurried building of a village of children which is being set up in a well-wooded and protected area.

"I could go on and tell you story after story -- of people who walk 80 miles and 100 miles to the safe areas, -- of kindness and great generosity from those who have so little.

"It is enough to say that the homeless people of Europe -- victims of war -- need our help."

REPORT FROM BORDEAUX - May 26, 1940

"The most urgent need at the moment is to care for the thousands of refugees who are passing through Bordeaux, stopping for just one night and going on the next morning. Last Monday was the peak day, when they had 35 trains, all of which had to be evacuated and first-aid given to the people. Most of the workers seem to spend 24 hours a day at the station. At first sight it seems like complete chaos, with refugees all over the platforms and a train of wounded being unloaded in the middle of everything. The Center here was organized last September for French evacuees, coming in much smaller numbers, and it is quite inadequate. With thousands and thousands arriving daily, they are frightfully cramped, and babies' cots, kitchens, refugee registration service and infirmary seem to be inextricably entangled. It is quite well organized, however, the only really difficulty being lack of space in the station."

FROM TOULOUSE - May 24, 1940

"We are feeding 10,000 young men and boys who have been gathered together for ultimate despatch to factories, farms, or barracks, and having been gathered, are left without food or drink. We are providing

them with coffee and other drinks twice a day, bread and pate and sausage. We expect to spend 80,000 francs on this undertaking in the next four days.

"A canteen has been started just opposite the center here. We hired a shop which was fortunately empty, found voluntary workers, stocked it with foods, borrowed utensils, the proprietor is heating the big pots of soup and so on, and we have fitted a small stove for coffee, milk, etc.

"Tomorrow four vans will go out with food, clothes, soap, to visit all small villages, giving them what we can, and getting a list of the most urgent needs. There are about 600 villages in this department alone, and every one is full of refugees - we cannot help half of them with the money we now have."