

American Friends Service Committee

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BULLETIN ON RELIEF IN FRANCE

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REFUGEE CONCENTRATION CAMPS IN FRANCE

The following paragraphs are excerpts from letters and reports received recently from France.

From Mary Elmes, American Friends Service Committee Representative in Perpignan, October 14, 1940.

"The greatest need we have to meet here is for clothing and medicines, especially for the camps. The fact that Bram is being transferred to Argeles only means that these people will be in a different camp and, if anything, in worse conditions. This is the third winter that these women and children (Spanish) are going to suffer the misery and cold of Argeles. I hope to be able to continue the fruit to these children from Bram and also to include the 500 already in Argeles. The Swiss give milk daily to the latter, but only up to 12 years of age and the others often go breakfastless. I had thought that once all the children were assembled in Argeles it might be possible to do something about this. Clothing is going to be a great need. With the wool we have purchased we calculate on being able to make some socks at an average cost of 22 frs. per garment. The work has already started at Argeles. We also have about 1,000 metres of material for making underclothing and trousers. In Carcassone there is an opportunity of buying 400 metres of woolen cloth for skirts and coats for the children: it is 140 cms. wide and costs 75 frs. per meter. It is an opportunity that will not arise again as woolen material is now almost unobtainable, but unless you can see your way to raising my balance I cannot make the purchase."

"Perhaps I have somewhat got the camps too much to the fore in my mind, but week by week I see the same privations and discomforts borne with fortitude and dignity and I scrape up every penny to do something to make the conditions a little more bearable. I do not speak here of the misery of the men in Argeles. It is much too great for us to salve. They sleep on the ground (beds are not allowed), their food is miserable in quantity and quality and many have only rags to wear, very many go barefoot."

"You will be glad to hear that we sent the first lot of clothing to St. Cyprien today. We also expect a further delivery of the

allocation for St. Cyprien, I hope to be able to procure more under-clothing and socks. Of the latter I have so far not been able to procure a single pair. In Carcassone I could obtain some good warm suits, but as these will cost about 300 frs. each, I hesitate to buy them as they could be given to only a very favoured few. I am also on the lookout for raincoats, but so far have not been able to find any reasonably priced.

"We have made inquiries about the possibilities of making purchases for Gurs and Vernet.

"While I cannot guarantee to be able to find enough goods to account for all of the allocations for these camps, I think that we have a good chance of finding a respectable quantity. M. Marcel Tordjman, who has always been very helpful ever since this Delegation has been in Perpignan, has promised to make a special journey to the factories and warehouses that he knows to find what he can for us and I am sure that if there is anything to be obtained at reasonable prices he will bring it back to us. We also have several other feelers out with other firms. I may not be able to make these purchases so rapidly as those for St. Cyprien, as goods are daily becoming more and more difficult to find, but I shall do my best, especially to obtain the women's clothing without too much delay. I presume the purchases for Gurs should include some children's garments and if possible I should be glad to have an idea of the numbers of women and children there and also of the number of men at Vernet."

From Howard E. Kershner, October 21, 1940

"Right now, on account of heavy rains extending over a period of more than a week, the camp of Argeles is flooded with water. These people normally sleep on the ground. Now they can only stand in water until they fall with exhaustion. This is the first time in my experience in France that the camps have been flooded. Apparently there is no answer and we do not know what, if anything, will be done about it."

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The American Friends Service Committee has learned that about nine thousand German Jews have been transferred from Southwestern German provinces to concentration camps in Southern France, particularly Gurs. Many of these people are children under sixteen and about 70% are over seventy.