

American Friends Service Committee

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BULLETIN ON RELIEF IN FRANCE

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SPANISH REFUGEES IN FRANCE

LETTER FROM HOWARD KERSHNER, OCTOBER 25, 1940

"There has been a very disastrous flood in the Basses Pyrenees. The women's part of the camp at Argeles had to be evacuated last Friday night. With the sound of the roaring sea in our ears, the rain falling and complete darkness, the evacuation of this camp was a difficult job. Some of the women became panic-stricken, were lost and drowned. All those who obeyed orders are safe. The flood waters have now subsided and the surface sand appears dry and normal again. The Colonel in charge of the camp and his officers cannot praise too highly the sacrifice and the discipline of the men who for four days and nights worked to save the stocks of food and to maintain the normal services of the camp. There are many unsung heroes whose brave deeds will never be known.

"I think the Spanish people have shown discipline, courage and character during their long tribulation in Spain and France, that is beyond all praise. They are patient, courteous and appreciative and were they given work to do, would do it well. Recently a Prefet remarked that everyone asked for Spanish labor because the Spaniards gave such excellent satisfaction. We have been particularly impressed by the aptitude of the Spanish pupils in school. On the whole, it is a very fine race of people."

FROM THE TOULOUSE OFFICE REPORT

"In order to realize the benefits of relief in this territory it is necessary to know the terrible conditions in which the Spanish colony finds itself. Actually, although numerous Spaniards, having worked in the war factories, had some reserves, these are now used up and an equal number coming from the Compagnies de Travailleurs obtained only half a franc a day. On their demobilization their families were deprived of the grant and this category of persons is now in absolute want.

"We have seen in these last few days families living together in the smallest places in order to bring the cost of rent to a minimum. In certain cases several persons were found to be living in a room measuring approximately three meters square, without even paillasses;

these last having been sold for the most urgent requirements of food or even sickness.

"The great distress of the Spanish colony facing curtailment of our food distribution makes necessary a project of reduced help solely for the most urgent and most unfortunate cases.

"By feeding families with at least 3 infants, women or old people to look after, we would be able to help sixty-three families, i.e., 350 persons.

"Under the second classification would come single women or women with children. This category represents 72 persons, including 10 children under 3 years.

"Finally, divided among the families above mentioned, there are 30 children under one year, to which the help with milk and farine lactee could be continued.

"Adding to this several urgent cases not classified above, a figure slightly above 1,000 frs. a day is obtained."

MATERNAL ASSISTANCE

"The number of Spanish expectant mothers having received relief up to September 30 is about one hundred. The lying-in having taken place under deplorable conditions, we have been forced to undertake immediate help. Layettes are being prepared but not in sufficient quantities to meet the number of births expected.

"For some women we have been able to obtain admission to the maternity, which is not always allowed to foreigners.

"With the collaboration of the Secours Suisse aux Femmes et aux Enfants, we have obtained supplementary milk for undernourished women. Up to date we are helping fifty children by giving sweetened milk or farine lactee of which we are the only suppliers, and which costs about 260 frs. per day.

"However, in view of the urgent needs, it would be very desirable if the help to women and to the new born children could be extended."

