

American Friends Service Committee

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The following extracts are taken from reports just received from A.F.S.C. relief workers in the various departments of Southern France.

"SPANIARDS STILL NEED US URGENTLY..."

"The Spaniards still need us urgently and as virtually the only private group still permitted to carry on for them, we have a serious responsibility to help work out with the government a solution for their difficulties. Richard Rees gave new assurances to the Ministry of the Interior that we were prepared to carry the approximate 5,000 children for at least one month. As the situation develops, this offer can be renewed. A circular to that effect has been sent by the Ministry of Interior and will prevent forced returns to Spain as might have happened after the departments had been notified that the government could no longer be responsible for feeding and housing Spaniards." June 6, 1940

"...A GREAT STRAIN ON THE DEPARTMENT OF HERAULT".

"The general position in Herault is rather chaotic. The number of refugees is much greater than, and the organization apparently rather less efficient than, in the Aude and the Pyrenees Orientales. The number of Belgians received is, I think, about 60,000 and the number of Luxembourgish 40,000. Herault had also, before this, received some 60,000 soldiers, and Montpellier itself is so crammed full that it is necessary to go 30 kms out of the town before one can find a bed. The countryside is entirely devoted to the cultivation of the vine. There are no market gardens for vegetables and practically no pasturage for milk, etc. These are, at any time, imported from other departments for the needs of Herault and a great strain has been imposed by the new influxes." June 1, 1940

"SEND ALL POSSIBLE FOOD TO TOULOUSE"

"We have urgent requests from the Landes for codliver oil as many of the children are in very poor condition. When we get information about the medical side of the work here, we are bound to find the same in this district.

"A centre d'accueil "Foyer" is one of the most needed things here at the moment; so we have today obtained from the Maire of Toulouse the entire "Halle aux Bles" - a huge place which should hold several thousand people during the day-time; we shall install there kitchens for serving hot meals to all new arrivals. We are making ourselves responsible for the food and most of the equipment and shall therefore need a large sum of money immediately.

"Please, do realise that Toulouse has a very much more serious problem to deal with than any of the other Southern towns, as all the young boys and men from 14 to 35 are being sent here and nobody has the situation in hand. We find daily groups of up to 600 people who have been here several days and have not received any rations whatsoever. Those who do get rations do not get enough. A distinct shortage is setting in. So please do send to us in Toulouse ALL possible food. We cannot buy anything more here. And the resume you have had does not include the villages in the 600 communes of this department!

"To sum up, Toulouse has been stripped bare of all necessities and nothing fresh is coming in by rail, except further crowds of refugees. For supply we are entirely dependent on what can come by motor transport from other parts of France." June 2, 1940

"BORDEAUX AREA WILL HARBOR 150,000 REFUGEES"

"Approximately 500,000 refugees have passed through the Bordeaux station on their way to other departments. All have been "Ravitailles" and many housed for one or even two nights. But 150,000 will definitely stay in the Gironde, in Bordeaux itself and the various communes which are not included in the rather large "zone reservee" near the coast, where no refugees will be allowed to stay.

"The centres still house about 1200 nightly. In the first, where the Prefecture had already provided beds, we equipped the infirmary and kitchen, and made possible a room where women who had just left the maternite with their babies could go to rest before being sent on.

"The second centre is being provided by us with 300 beds (complete with paillasse, traversin, blanket and in some cases sac de couchage). Many more are needed, and we are trying to get the Prefecture to put in 500. We are also equipping a kitchen. This centre would seem the most suitable for a permanent one where men can stay while looking for work, or until they have found lodgings. About a thousand could be taken in and it is very doubtful whether another "locale" could be found in Bordeaux at the moment." June 3, 1940

"...MET A SEEMINGLY ENDLESS STREAM OF BELGIAN CARS."

"Arrived at Agen in the morning, having met a seemingly endless stream of Belgian cars, packed with bundles and parcels, mattresses etc. strapped on the roof, and counted up to 10 people in an average car. Met lorries, and even a mowing machine, all bright and new with paint, and 5 or 6 people on it.

"It appears that Lot-et-Garonne is reserved for French refugees, who had not really started coming yet, and that the Belgians only

ought to have passed through. A great number of them were however accepted there, mainly probably because Toulouse, where they had been told to go, is unable to take more." May 25, 1940

".....REAL LOVE AND FORETHOUGHT IN THEIR PREPARATIONS".

"I went on to Mont de Marsen, where I saw the secretaire-general, M. Lamy, a very charming and enthusiastic little man, who was in charge of all refugee work in the Landes. It seems to be extremely well organized, and an incredible amount of real love and forethought has gone into their preparations, with the result that they have beds, bedding, large amounts of food, etc., stored, and ready for use. They needed clothing very badly, however; a great number of the refugees arrived with practically no clothes, some even in pyjamas or nightdress under their coats - and having travelled like that often 10 to 14 days!

"An Alsatian Doctor, Waitz, had been put in charge of the sanitary problems. They are going to buy frigidaires to keep the milk for the babies fresh, in two or three centres; they ordered the bath-tubs from somewhere while I was there. Dr. Waitz said that unless very great care was taken, they would all have scabies, etc., before the end of the first week - their skin was so tender through not having been washed for nearly a fortnight.

"They ask to have 1,000 tins of skimmed milk sent."

"Both here and in the Landes, we shall establish work-rooms so that the refugees can make their own clothes, mattress covers, etc. There seemed to be a quite exceptional spirit of happy busy-ness, where everybody was working day and night when necessary without giving it an extra thought." May 25, 1940