

FOREIGN SERVICE BULLETIN



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AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE

Quaker Work in Paris Prisons

by KATRINA BARNES

(Katrina Barnes is a volunteer worker at the Paris Friends Center.)

One of the most important aspects of the activities of the Paris delegation of Secours Quaker is the work at thirteen prisons and camps. This work, done with the permission of the government, is headed by Henri Schultz of Secours Quaker with the help of six others. The staff visit the prisons and camps day after day, taking food packages, medical supplies and clothing.

Collaborator or Not?

One of the girls told of a woman who had come to the prison service office that day: "Mme. Weber came in this morning. She is German but has lived in France for ten years. Though she and her husband have letters from a Resistance officer in the French army saying that they are innocent of anything remotely resembling collaboration, her husband has been jailed by the French authorities. First, they were both put 'temporarily' in prison by the Americans while their papers were being verified. They were both in jail for three months. Then Madame Weber was released, but her husband was detained on the grounds that he has no dossier. The reason, it seems, that he has no dossier is that the authorities have no charges against him. For the moment, there is little hope of getting him out of prison." Secours Quaker sends food to Monsieur Weber and helps his wife. The Quaker worker who told of the Webers ended her story by saying, "Poor Madame Weber. The skin under her eyes is loose and sagging and red from constant crying."

Self-Help of Prisoners

Conditions in the prisons have never been good, but during the past five years of war, due to the fact that they are overcrowded and have shortages of food, they have been very bad. At Fresnes, the largest of the political prisons, notorious during the Nazi regime, the cells, constructed to house one or two inmates are now used for from four to six. Here Secours Quaker has started the Service Medico-Sociale. The prisoners elect their own delegates who investigate cases and indicate the neediest to the Quaker workers. These workers then visit the families, taking food packages, medical supplies, and clothing to them as well as to the member of the family in prison.

The prisoners take up "collections" for the poorest by directing the Quakers to the families of the richer prisoners who contribute supplies to the less fortunate. Recently 200 pairs of shoes were collected by this method. When it is impossible to collect enough supplies for the prisoners through the Service Medico-Sociale, Secours Quaker provides as much as possible from its own stocks, including food for babies of nursing mothers who are in jail.

Conditions at Drancy

There are still in existence three of the five camps originally set up for political prisoners. In these camps are people of many nationalities, French, German, Dutch, Polish, Swiss, Belgian, Italian, even a few Chinese. The largest of these camps is Drancy, where conditions were very bad at first. Some of the inmates were housed in damp cellars, others in barn-like enclosures where they had only bits of straw for use as beds and where sanitary facilities were very bad. Many people died. Though conditions at Drancy have definitely improved, many people have been waiting a long time for questioning and trial. One of the services performed by Secours Quaker at these camps when they first came into being was the aid given to those who were arrested and taken away with no time to put their dwellings in order or to notify their families. The Quaker workers went to the homes of these people, tidied them and took word to the despairing families and friends.

Help to Jailed Children

A great part of the work here before 1939 was the regular visits paid to the criminal prisons. This has continued all during the war and is still going on. The food in such jails, as well as other conditions, has always been bad but now is appalling. If a prisoner has no relative to take him food, he starves. Food packages are life to them. Many wait as long as six to eight months for trial. Delinquent children are put into these jails. Although it is stipulated that they are to be lodged there for only a short time before being sent to a home for delinquents, they seem to remain indefinitely. There is also the "Maison d'Education Surveille" for delinquents, which is, in fact, a jail for children. Here Secours Quaker provides movies as well as food and clothing.

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The Reconstruction of an Italian Village

The AFSC-FAU Reconstruction Group in Chieti Province in Italy continues its work in aiding, in whatever way possible, the rebuilding of essential housing in the worst of the war-damaged villages of the Aventino River Valley.

In its work, the group seeks to stimulate private initiative, in cooperation with local officials. The program has been considered an emergency one, and although many opportunities for longer term planning and welfare assistance present themselves the group has tried to restrict itself to immediate needs before the arrival of winter.

The lack of materials was the prime factor in blocking the way of reconstruction, and the transport offered by the two trucks (2½ ton) and command car of the Quaker unit is of the greatest use.

David Hartley of the AFSC describes the progress of the work in the village of Colledemacine, where operations got underway at the end of May:

"I am sitting on a rock in the shade of a pile of stone which has been salvaged from the debris and stacked neatly for later use. To my left is the hill and little grove of trees where we spent the last three nights. We tried commuting from Casoli, where we are the guests of an Italian family, but we discovered that we wasted time and gasoline, and hence three of us packed some food and our blanket rolls to spend several days here getting the work started.

Tiles in Exchange for Wood

"Until yesterday, some of the people in the process of rebuilding had been sifting the debris and making a sort of mud for mortar, and they hoped it would not rain before tiles which we shall transport arrived since the mortar would not stand up under rain. We have made a quick census of the village to determine the average number of people for each habitable room (three and one-third persons to a room 10 by 10 feet), and we have visited the houses which the village reconstruction committee selected as being repairable.

"The plan is that the villagers may trade wood from the communal forest in exchange for building materials such as brick tiles and plaster. The villagers may purchase the timber and convert it into fuel wood valued at 200 to 250 Lira per quintale (app. \$2 to \$2.50 per 200 lbs.) and trade it to a local kiln at the rate of 20 quintale of wood to 500 tiles.

"On an earlier trip we had asked the committee to compile a list of the people wishing to buy tiles for roofing and a list of those wishing to exchange wood for tiles. Thirty-five families have asked for 45,000 tiles, and hence about 96 additional rooms should be available and 300 persons should have accommodation by winter. Some members of the community are interested in making a similar arrangement for obtaining gesso plaster; that is, the



This picture of an Italian village where Quaker workers are offering transportation of vital materials for reconstruction shows the main street being cleaned by men, women and children. The upper right of the scene indicates the rocky peak on which the village is built. The small house on the right into which the people are going was a four-room dwelling and is being rebuilt as two rooms with storage and animal shelter on the off-hill side. The house was rebuilt by a father, mother and ten-year-old son. Like other houses in the village, it has no sanitary facilities nor running water.

exchange of one quintal of wood for one to two of gesso.

The Mayor Calls a Meeting

"Last night the mayor called a meeting and thirteen people signed for 236 quintal of gesso in exchange for 118 quintal of wood. This morning, the truck was loaded with the 14 quintal of wood and left for the kiln with the owners who will do their own bargaining. This is the first load we have carried and is a great occasion for us.

"You would have enjoyed the meeting. It was held in a local wine shop which is a room about 20 by 20 feet. We sat at a little table by the window with the mayor, and about 60 people crowded in around us. They were young and old, and stood silently while we asked questions of individuals. The most discussion came when the mayor suggested that they select representatives to go to the gesso kiln and the brick kiln to make a contract for the materials needed by the various villagers. No one seemed willing to give up the necessary half day of work, but after some discussion three men agreed to go.

"We have been made to feel very welcome. One has to be careful not to show too much interest in food in preparation or one is likely to end up with a huge plate of pasta with cheese sprinkled over the top. One old woman followed us several blocks the other afternoon insisting that we accept a handful of *fave* (huge green beans)."

Services to Individuals

In the years preceding and during the war, when great numbers of individuals in Europe found themselves fleeing to escape persecution, the many calls upon the American Friends Service Committee to provide assistance and asylum led to the establishment of a division of Services to Individuals which is an integral part of the Foreign Service Section of the AFSC, and an inevitable and logical outgrowth of AFSC operations abroad.

Happily, much of the urgency and tragedy which lay behind the work in former years has disappeared, but there remain many services which the AFSC is called upon to render, even though the staff attempts to give only such help as other agencies do not provide. An indication of the scope of this work and of the human lives and destinies involved can be seen in the following reports which staff members have prepared:

Inquiries Regarding Missing Persons

The morning's mail alternates with anxiety and hope. Business men, scientists, farmers write in about relatives from whom they have had no word since Pearl Harbor, relatives whom they are anxious to find and help. Letters come from a variety of APO numbers, from embarkation camps, from hospitals to ask for help in locating parents deported or unheard from in Europe.

"I want to thank you for helping me come to this glorious United States of America. I am one of your many boys that came by way of France in 1941 . . . I myself came from Austria, and I left in 1938 from my dear parents which I have not seen since then or heard of. I was six years old when I left, and I am 13 now. Since the war is over in Europe I would greatly appreciate if you could help me locate my parents."

"He and I were to be married . . . I lost his home address . . . I know something has happened to him. If you can help me get in contact with him or some of his relatives I would be very grateful to you . . ."

"I am a naturalized American citizen. My husband is also, and is now in the U. S. Army somewhere overseas. We both have our families in Europe and are naturally very much worried about them. I thought that now the Russians occupied the city where my mother lives, maybe with your kind help I could send a message to find out how they are."

"I had a little nephew in France. He was interned with his parents at the terrible camp of Gurs and Riversalte. His parents have been deported to Poland. The little boy was given in care into a camp somewhere in the South of France which was cared for by the Society of Friends . . . I would greatly appreciate it if you could be of any help to me in tracing my little nephew."

One feels how numerous and how strong are the family ties between citizens all over this country and the stateless wanderers of the Old World.

All such inquiries are channeled through the Central Location Index of which the AFSC is a mem-

ber. So far, there are relatively few locations to report. Occasionally we receive a report that the person sought is still in Theresienstadt, the large camp for Jewish deportees. Now and then there is a verification of former address, with comment such as "good health, no news from relatives." Sometimes the inquirer writes to us saying that at last word has come from the person sought in Europe.

One notices the difference between new and older Americans who have lost touch, perhaps forever, with a close relative: the new American is likely to accept the fact that his family will have been decimated and that he must be indefinitely patient in waiting for word from his parent or child. The old American is incredulous and indignant at finding himself in a situation beyond his control. Frantically or with fortitude, the relatives on safe ground lean upon the barriers and wait for word that may come tomorrow.

Welfare Messages and Transfer of Money

These services cover a wide variety of problems and are carried on through AFSC representatives abroad. An individual desiring to give aid to a relative in Europe may transfer funds through the AFSC to Sweden, Spain, Portugal, and Switzerland, and it is expected that other countries may soon be added to the list.

A few examples of welfare inquiries follow:

The son of a family of Hungarian Jews heard from his parents that they had at last reached Geneva in the fall of 1944. They wanted help, particularly warm clothing, saying, "Switzerland is beautiful but very, very cold." We communicated with the AFSC representatives in Switzerland and enlisted their aid for the family which is soon to be on its way to Palestine.

A message from Italy about a stateless refugee woman was finally sent on its way to her husband in New York. It was his first news in several years, and his joy was great that the family was now in direct communication, and that the mother was working for the Allies in Italy. The daughter, in America, had just been married, and her happiness was increased many fold by being able to share it with her mother in letters.

We were asked by the AFSC Lisbon office to obtain power of attorney permitting a woman in Portugal to use money left there by her daughter now in the United States. Weeks of work involved procuring Treasury License which permitted the mailing of the document.

The AFSC office here was asked by a person in the United States to investigate the situation of a relative in North Africa imprisoned for a long term for a crime he claims he did not commit. Our offices have kept correspondence moving and have tried to keep him in touch with his family, also giving him a little material help. Transfers of money from relatives, even in small amounts, often mean the difference between hope and despair.

Questions of Immigration

The status of U. S. immigration has changed considerably this last year. Persons whose records had been put aside as inactive because of the fact that they were in occupied countries can be assisted again in their efforts to come to this country. Relatives are writing, too, about family members still in Germany when all outlets closed, and while we do not know when immigration for them may be permitted we want to be prepared to take each step as it does become possible.

We are hearing from old friends:

A university professor in the United States has written to the AFSC asking whether we can now help his sister in Germany to emigrate. We last heard from her in 1941. She was then a social worker and in close contact with the Berlin Friends Center. Although she is now over 60, we do not doubt that a person of her vitality and ability will find a place in this country, if we can help her to join her relatives here.

Another professor here has his wife and daughter in Belgium and has asked us to file documents now that the American consulates in Belgium are reopened. The two women have been in hiding under fictitious names ever since the Germans occupied that country. For the father and husband these have been terrible years of anxiety which show clearly in his face.

Another old friend for whom we could do nothing for several years because of lack of transportation is a former Viennese lawyer. The Quaker office in Vienna was helping him and advising his family as early as 1939. The increasing danger in Austria made this family seize the opportunity to go to Tahiti where the man started a photography studio. The climate and its attendant tropical diseases have reduced their forces but not their spirit. As soon as there was a chance again, the man wrote asking us to reopen their immigration case. Their visa was granted a short time ago.

A new type of request comes from refugee parents who have settled in this country and now want

their children in England to join them. Most of these children were originally brought to London under the care of Friends in London. They were placed in schools and foster homes to await the time when their parents could offer them a home here.

The AFSC is concerned not only with immigration to this country, but with migration to other countries as well:

A man in South America asked for news concerning his eleven-year-old nephew in France who has been under the care of Secours Quaker. If possible he would like the boy to join him in South America.

In Madrid, two little Czechoslovakian girls of eleven and twelve years whose mother was dying of cancer needed to be planned for. Their only relative was the father's sister in the United States, a single woman of 52 years who earned her living in domestic service. Working through the U. S. Committee for European Children and a local agency in the city where the aunt lived, we were able to perfect plans for the children to come to this country as wards of their aunt who eagerly looks forward to caring for them as her own.

An elderly German couple, previously known to our offices in Paris and Marseille and now important participants in activities of the AFSC's Powell House in New York, asked for help in locating their luggage which was left in the Quaker office in Marseille in 1941 to be forwarded to the U. S. but which never arrived. If it cannot be found, books and manuscripts of great value to these old people will be lost.

Employment Counseling and Placement of Refugees

Although many new Americans have been helped to find a place for themselves economically and socially and to become citizens of their adopted home, there still remain many calls for help and advice in employment.

There are some people at present employed who seek positions in which they can make fuller use of their skills and experience. Others, older or physically handicapped people, are in search of part-time employment. Finally, there is a considerable group of intellectuals who are seeking teaching or research work.

One person whom the AFSC placed in a teaching position last fall, after considerable effort because of health problems involved, has just joyfully informed us of his reappointment for next year. This means that he can now proceed with plans for bringing to this country his wife and children from whom war and persecution have separated him for some five or six years.

A German doctor who early in the 1920's gave up a practice of medicine to become a top executive of the German Medical Association, came to this country shortly before the war. After vainly trying to secure a grant which would make it possible for

him to publish a monumental thesis on American socialized medicine, he came to the AFSC for placing. We were unsuccessful in securing more than temporary work for him for several years, and when we finally put on an intensive drive in his behalf, he was working as a day laborer in a railroad yard. We decided that his best prospects lay in the field of socialized medicine and we circularized every such organization in the United States and Canada. Through one of the branches in a western city, this doctor received an offer from a well-known Psychiatric Clinic. At their expense he was to go with his family and household goods. However, he had so completely lost confidence in himself that instead of doing this, he went alone and changed what was a firm offer into a thirty-day trial. Fortunately, he well survived the trial, and is now one of the important officials in the clinic. His self-confidence is reestablished, his wife, who is a writer, has published a book, and their son has fitted well into American life.

An Austrian railroad specialist, always more interested in the intellectual than in the remunerative side of his work, came to the United States and was not able to find satisfactory employment. In the fall of 1943, a government agency in Washington was looking for people with first-hand experience in European railroad operation. We suggested this man and secured an interview with the proper executive. From time to time, a staff member visiting Washington followed the matter up. Thirteen

months later, the appointment finally came through. Since he has been in this position, his personality and work have given great satisfaction and he has received two promotions.

Hospitality for Refugees

Underlying all these Services to Individuals is the central motivating spirit of the AFSC, the key word of which is "individuals." From the search for missing relatives to all the complicated problems of immigration, employment, and naturalization, the work requires an array of technical services. The AFSC however always seeks to go beyond technical services and to give friendly aid in the intangible human problems involved in adjustment to a new culture, to fill the need for social contacts, or to help the New Americans to find their place in American life.

Some of the ways the AFSC carries out this concern to meet the more human needs are through Friendship parties, through the varied activities of Powell House in New York City, through the summer vacation program at Sky Island at Nyack, New York, through correspondence with former refugees now soldiers overseas, through informal entertaining in the homes and centers of Friends across the United States. Whatever the need or the question, the inquirer will find a welcome in the flower-bedecked reception office of the Foreign Service Section of the AFSC in Philadelphia, or in its counterparts over the world.



An Oasis at Le Havre

Harvey Buchanan of the AFSC has arrived at Le Havre where he will join in the work already begun by three French members of Secours Quaker, seven members of the British Friends Relief Service, and a staff of six French people.

"I wish so much that all those who have worked so devotedly these last four years to make, collect, and pack clothing for the relief work of the AFSC could have been with me yesterday (June 5) when I visited Le Havre. Having seen London and Plymouth and other badly blitzed cities in England, I was prepared for scenes of great destruction, but the damage far surpassed anything I had expected. It was difficult to believe that it had all happened eight months ago, for so little seemed to have been done since the city was laid waste.

"A few shops remained but they did not contain many articles of clothing, and for those who had survived the bombing there was no way in which they could set up house again and restock their wardrobes as in England. All they could do was to wait . . . wait for supplies that didn't arrive, and wait for a place to live.

"In the midst of this scene of tragedy and want is an oasis, the Secours Quaker Vestiaire, housed in one of three long wooden huts in the garden of a bombed house. It is a long, low building, and its walls are entirely covered with rows of deep shelves

which are stacked high to the ceiling with clothing of all descriptions. Everything is well arranged and organized according to size, etc. I recognized some of the suits and dresses made in the New York AFSC workroom as well as patchwork quilts from the church groups and coverlets made up of knitted squares which Friends from Chicago and the Middle West sometimes send us. Down the center of the room were more large racks containing overcoats and shoes.

"I talked with the people working there and they pointed out that everything seemed to arrive in splendid condition. They told me many stories of the joy that this clothing was giving to the people who receive it every day, not only because they are getting something they have been needing for months, but also because they realize that what they take away with them often represents hours of loving care on the part of some unknown person several thousand miles away. They are deeply touched by the thought that anyone should care enough for them in their distress to do this for them."

—John Judkyn, Secours Quaker, Paris.

Visit to Caen

Two Americans are now working at Caen as appointees of the AFSC: Burns Chalmers, a joint appointee with the Congregational Christian Service Committee, and Charlotte Brooks. There are seven French members of the staff and seven members of Friends Relief Service of England.

"It is a distressing experience even after all these months to visit a devastated town, to walk through the dust among the ruins and to realize how quickly such destruction is achieved and how long the rebuilding process is.

Hospitality of the Abbaye

"The four Secours Quaker barracks are in the courtyard of the Abbaye des Hommes and from the windows of these barracks one looks across to the apse and Norman towers of that truly beautiful church. It was in the cellar of this church that the people of Caen took shelter during the bombardment. It was here that the priest blessed them twice a day during the dangerous days when it was hardly safe to move in the streets. Several committees are still providing food and shelter in the rooms of the Abbaye for the homeless.

"Across the courtyard from the Secours Quaker barracks are those of the Swiss Red Cross which are of sturdy construction, being Swiss army barracks with sturdy floors with running water and lavatories. The Swiss have organized a nursery for some of the children in the community.

"The Secours Quaker team is lodged in rooms which are offices or clothing distribution centers during the day and sitting rooms or bedrooms when the day's work is done. They eat together around a big table, and as is always the case where the job is relief and particularly transport, workers straggle in late from a hard day's work. There is more to do than the hours of the day permit and it has been a slow and difficult job to get this program under way.

"The Ruins Sang Thanksgiving"

"There are many stories of events here on V-E day. One of the most touching is that of the church bells ringing in the evening: the citizens of Caen were deeply moved to hear the sweet and familiar bells of the cathedral of which only the bell tower stands. Hearing those bells on the night when men were laying down their arms in Europe, catching the deep echoes among the shattered stones, they say it was as if the ruins were also singing the Thanksgiving for Peace.

"We visited some of the villages, several almost totally demolished by bombardment. It is disheartening that thousands of families may have to endure another winter crowded together in temporary shelter. We visited the little town of Aulnay-sur-Odon where it is hoped that Secours Quaker transport service can make a contribution in reconstruction efforts. We spent some time also with a few families from that town who are billeted in a neighboring community: the wheelwright who has re-established a crude little shop; men, women, and children living five or six in a single room; the little laundress who, crowded as she is and without facilities, has hung up her sign again and has gone to work.

"It is after visiting families like these that one understands that what seems like difficult and uncomfortable living of our own staff is indeed luxury. When I commented on the fact that there was no great comfort for our staff at Caen, they laughed and said: 'But it is luxury because several of us have rooms to ourselves.'"

—Margaret Frawley, Secours Quaker, Paris.

To the Relief of Kweichow

The Friends Ambulance Unit China Convoy will have a significant role in assisting with the first project to be undertaken by the Chinese division of UNRRA in behalf of refugees in Kweichow Province.

The China Convoy has received twenty-five new Canadian-built trucks from the American Red Cross to be used in Kweichow. Dick Edwards of the FAU will be in charge of the transport side of FAU participation in the project. William Rahill of the FAU has been seconded to UNRRA as full-time assistant to Mr. Harry Price, Deputy Director of the UNRRA China office.

A relief problem has existed in the Machingping, Tushan, and Nantan areas of Kweichow ever since the Japanese offensives of last December. A coordinating body of voluntary effort has worked hard to alleviate a portion of the worst suffering but its

resources have been too small. The situation has become steadily worse, and some thousands of refugees are caught in the area without hope of improving their own lot, and with epidemics spreading abetted by famine conditions. At the request of the United States Army, the Chinese National Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, with advice and counsel from the small administrative UNRRA group in Chungking has undertaken this project. CNRRA, being a new organization without supplies and transport, relies heavily on the army for help and on voluntary bodies like the FAU.

Plans are: first, the rush of seed rice into the area to enable farmers to plant a crop this year; secondly, the import of rice probably from Yuanling area for feeding of refugees; third, a medical program to combat epidemics and to restore health; and lastly, finding employment and relocation for a large number of displaced persons.

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