

AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE

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FOREIGN SERVICE SECTION

News from Germany

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Child Feeding in the American Zone of Germany

Over the desk of the American Friends Service Committee have come hundreds of thank you letters from the children in the American zone of Germany. They paint a touching picture. It is that of hundreds of hungry boys and girls going to school in the morning or afternoon, looking forward eagerly to the food which has come to them during the past year through your gifts.

Since March of 1946, the AFSC has shipped 930 tons of food supplies into the American zone of Germany through the facilities of the Council of Relief Agencies Licensed to Operate in Germany (CRAILOG). Practically all of these supplies have gone into childfeeding programs in the three Laender of Bavaria, Grosse Hesse, Wurttemberg-Baden, and the Bremen enclave. The shipments have been largely of powdered milk, cereal, margarine, soya, cheese, flour, canned vegetables, and powdered eggs.

The child feeding program in Germany was initiated on May 20th, 1946, when Claude Shotts, the American Friends Service Committee CRAILOG representative in Berlin, proposed to the German Central Committee that the supplies shipped by the Service Committee be used in a school feeding program for the children.

The German Central Committee acted on the proposal and voted unanimously that the supplies shipped by the Service Committee be used for a child feeding program operated by Laender committees consisting of representatives of the public welfare and of the German welfare organizations -- Arbeiter Wohlfahrt, the Evangelische Hilfswerke, and Caritas.

The German organizations agreed to contribute a certain percentage of the food supplies designated for those agencies by private relief agencies in America. In Grosse Hesse, this amounted, for a number of months, to 50% of all supplies received by those agencies. The plan provided that AFSC supplies would be divided among the various laender on this basis: 46% were to go to Bavaria; 26% to Grosse Hesse, 23% to Wurttemberg, and 5% to Bremen.

Grosse Hesse was the first of the laender to set up its committees and begin child feeding. It began in the schools of Kassel in July of 1946, and by August, 14,071 children from 6 to 14 years of age were receiving supplementary food at school. The children were selected on the basis of a physical examination.

Claude Shotts tells us further concerning the mechanics of the feeding programs in the four laender:

"In Grosse Hesse there was much discussion about the amount of food to be given by the private welfare agencies (Arbeiter Wohlfahrt, Evangelische Hilfswerke, and Caritas). It was finally agreed that they would each designate 50% of the food received from America to the child feeding program. Several weeks passed before this was fully accepted by the private agencies, but once the action was taken, the

feeding proceeded with growing popularity and increasing interest on the part of all persons concerned. In every case, the city administration became greatly interested in the child feeding and did everything in its power to assist the program. Later, when the supplies from America began to run short, a number of the cities augmented the supplies by special contributions from the food allocated to the city for rationing purposes. In addition to the supplies coming from America through CRAILOG channels, a number of contributions were made from the supplies sent in from other countries through the International Red Cross. A large shipment of sugar from Ireland was a very important factor in the child feeding program throughout the American Zone. At the maximum point, a total of 80,000 children were included in the feeding program in Grosse Hesse.

"Wurttemberg-Baden --- The child feeding plans in Wurttemberg-Baden were delayed because the laender committee was not organized as soon as in Grosse Hesse, and because there were more problems of organizational relationship after the committee was formed. The first plans were announced from Wurttemberg-Baden around September, when it was proposed that about 30,000 children were to be fed with the opening of school in the fall. This figure was later increased to more than 40,000. . . .

"One of the unique things about the child feeding in Wurttemberg-Baden was some of the democratic experiments that were worked out in certain localities. Under the leadership of the employed staff of the Land Committee, the children themselves participated in making decisions about the operation of the program in the given cities. In certain localities a great deal of responsibility was taken by local people in supplementing the supplies provided from American sources. One of the interesting democratic projects was related to the distribution of a large shipment of children's shoes sent by the AFSC. It was agreed that these shoes should be delivered as part of the child feeding action, and the Land Committee of Wurttemberg-Baden asked the local committees to develop their own methods of distribution. In one or more of the schools, the problem was handed to the student council, and a procedure was worked out in which the children themselves selected the persons to receive shoes.

"Bavaria --- In Bavaria we did not receive as complete statistics on the child feeding program as we did in the other lands. It was reported, however, that with the beginning of the opening of school, on October 1, there was a children's feeding program involving more than 100,000 children, mostly from the large cities in Bavaria.

"The private welfare agencies took a great deal more initiative in Bavaria than was the case in the other laender. However, the Public Welfare office of the Military Government took an active part in setting up the plan and in carrying out the feeding program. The reports from the various cities in Bavaria would indicate that there was a great deal of democratic participation on the part of local child feeding committees, and that the experience meant a great deal to the communities in which the programs were developed."

An on-the-spot description of how the child feeding actually worked in Darmstadt and of conditions there is given by Lew Berg, one of our transport team, in a letter dated February 23rd, 1947. He writes:

"When the Darmstadt schools opened last fall, they found themselves severely handicapped for just about everything needed to conduct school. Not only were material facilities lacking, but the children were also seriously undernourished in nearly all cases, being from 5 to 15 kilos underweight. Such conditions called for remedy and that was where CRAILOG fitted into the picture. The plan was that CRAILOG supplies should be allocated for school lunches from the undesignated supplies shipped from

America. This meant that the Quaker supplies were channeled to this program. However, Arbeiter Wohlfahrt, Caritas, and Evangelische Hilfswerke organizations thought that the idea was so good that they agreed to contribute to the program half of their shares of the supplies coming from America and earmarked for their organizational distribution. This decision went into effect throughout the Land of Greater Hesse, which is one of the three Lands in the American Zone, and the one in which Darmstadt is located.

"One of the interesting things about this feeding program is that it is actually serving as a vehicle for helping the Germans to learn and to relearn some of the democratic techniques so completely lost during the Hitler Zeit (Hitler time). Each community is made responsible for the handling of its own feeding program. Committees are selected and chosen by the interested people to help in the work, and these committees learn by working out together the problems of the organization and of the actual work involved in the program. This results in some variation, of course, from community to community in the way the thing is handled.

"Darmstadt -- the program includes Greater Darmstadt, consisting of the town proper together with the suburbs of Eberstadt and Arheilgen -- was very fortunate in having an already established and very well equipped city kitchen. Because it had once been the kitchen for the military post in which it is located, it was capable of accommodating large numbers of people or large quantities of food. This post, in the outskirts of the town, suffered little damage from the bombing attacks on Darmstadt, and so remains virtually intact, together with its kitchen and equipment. No longer a military post, it has proved a convenient quarters for various city offices.

"Here the allocations of CRAIOG supplies are brought and stored until they are required for the program -- which is usually very soon after they appear, the quantity having been so small already before Christmas that the program had to be reduced from 5 days per week to 3 days per week of lunches for the children. The kitchen normally has 23 employees to carry on its cooking activities for this and other programs. Because this group has been sifted down to consist of people who are both skilled and interested now, a strenuous effort is made during slack periods to keep these people employed at other city tasks in order to have them available when they are needed for the feeding programs.

"Other feeding programs being carried out include the cooking en masse of the supplies obtained by many people who have no means of cooking them and so bring their lebensmittel cards or the stuff they've bought with them to this kitchen and are in turn fed there as a group from these rations. Then there are various labor groups who receive meals from the city at one time or another and are brought here where there are some small "mess" halls as well as the kitchen.

"When the school feeding program was being set up, there came the problem of how to select the recipients of the benefits of such a program. Various bases were considered, but the final decision was that inasmuch as there was not a single one of the children who was not undernourished, all should be fed except as they should voluntarily exempt themselves. There have actually been several such cases (number unknown by any of my interviewers) where the youngsters have said that they felt they had enough at home and should not accept these provisions. It is hard to say how much of this may have been motivated by parental promptings and what may have been the factors in the parents' minds. . . . Consequently, virtually all of the 8400 children between the ages of 6 and 14 years in the schools are being fed. These children come from the 3 named communities and from the farms in a circular area around Darmstadt with a radius of approximately 20 km.

"When school is in session, the food is cooked up in the kitchen and then city trucks take it in special mess kettles which keep it hot to the various schools where it is to be used. There are 7 such Volksschules. It is just possible that some of these youngsters are in the Höferschules also but this I failed to ascertain. The latter include mostly children beyond the age limit of 14, but I believe there are also some under 14. 6 such schools exist. The lunches go out during the middle of the forenoon and then again in the middle of the afternoon for the other classes which have replaced those in session in the morning.

"The reduction to 3 days per week of activity occurred during the last 6 weeks of the school session before the December 20 closing for the Christmas holidays. Since that time school has not been resumed, because of the intense cold and the lack of any reasonable amount of fuel to provide heat. Consequently the feeding program has not been in process either. Now, however, the group working on the thing is attempting to work out some basis upon which the feeding of the same children can be accomplished even when school is not in session. There has always been the hope that next week school would be able to open again after a break in the weather, but always next week has brought only more cold and continued depletion of the coal stocks of the community which could not be replenished because of the frozen rivers, which made the boat transport upon which they rely impossible. So it is now proposed that the program be carried on regardless of school. The same cold which has eliminated school and coal stocks simultaneously has also held up delivery upon the diminishing supplies of food for the feeding program, so that, contrary to first thought, there has not been any great stockpiling, locally at least, of the materials with which to feed the youngsters. The closing of school during the cold has been rather general in this section of Germany at least."

During March of 1947, 200,000 children were receiving supplementary food in the schools of the American zone through CRAILOG. In the early summer, the Hoover feeding program began in the American zone of Germany and the Control Office of the United States Military Government for Germany reports that by the end of June, 1947, 3,550,000 children were receiving supplementary feeding in the schools.

This winter the American Friends Service Committee is sending most of its supplies to the British and French Zones of Germany, where the winter will be cruel and the need even greater than it was last winter.

The next issue of this bulletin will report on the child feeding programs in the British and French zones.