REPORT ON THE CONDITION OF POLISH REFUGEES IN RUMANIA AND HUNGARY

BY

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The following report is based on an investigation of refugee conditions carried out under the auspices of the Society of Friends and the Polish Relief Fund between October 17 and November 3. During this time some twenty-three military camps and civilian centres were inspected in Rumania and Hungary. The fullest co-operation was given by the civil and military authorities in both countries in the inspection of records and accommodation, and in permission to talk freely with Polish soldiers and civilians.

Exact figures regarding the total numbers and classification of refugees are not yet available owing to registration being incomplete, the uncontrolled movement of civilians, and the entrance of stragglers over the Russian frontier, which still continues. There appear, however, to be 30,000 to 35,000 in Rumania, of which 10,000 are civilians; 48,000 to 50,000 in Hungary, of which again some 10,000 are civilians. Women and young children form less than a fifth of the civilians, and there are very few young children without at least one parent. There are, however, some six hundred or more Polish boy scouts and other boys of from 12 to 18 who came over with the army; many of these have in Hungary been interned with the soldiers. There are also several hundred students in both countries. About half the male civilians are "functionaries"—postmen, police, civil servants, etc.—who were evacuated by the Polish Government. Only a small number of peasants appear to have crossed the frontier.

In both Rumania and Hungary we were continually impressed by the obvious desire of the authorities to do their best for the refugees, but it was equally clear that circumstances made the immediate provision of adequate accommodation and equipment completely impossible. Thus Rumania, with nearly a million men mobilized and a new class to be called this month, was short of bedding, clothing, and barracks even for her own army, while Hungary was still in the process of absorbing some thousands of her own refugees from Transylvania, and was finding the sudden influx of 50,000 Poles an almost intolerable strain on public funds. Food was in both countries available in adequate amount, but there was no question that all amenities, and in fact many necessities such as clothing and bedding, would have to be provided by outside agencies.

Refugees in Rumania

Almost all the refugees at present in Rumania, together with many other civilians with private means who have since left the country, crossed the northern frontier within forty-eight hours in the third week in September. Although the authorities were expecting a large influx, and had sent twenty-five army trains fitted with bathing and disinfecting facilities to the frontier, the numbers were so overwhelming that all attempts at orderly delousing, registration, and distribution completely broke down. The civilians found their way, largely haphazard, to Bucarest or villages throughout the country, where they were taken in by the peasants, who showed them the utmost generosity. The soldiers were disarmed and interned, according to international law, large numbers being sent to Tulcea and Babadag in the Dobrudja. This had the advantage of concentrating them in a militarily "empty" zone well

away from the northern frontier, but as the Dobrudja is a marshy and highly malarious region it has resulted in a considerable amount of infection.

The Government is now allowing 100 lei a day for each civilian adult (50 lei for a child), which with the low cost of living is adequate to provide for food and lodging. In order to draw it, however, the civilians must register and remain in one of thirty-six provincial centres outside Bucarest and away from the northern frontier. Those we visited appeared to be reasonably well provided with board and lodging, but hardly any had more than the summer clothes they came away in. There is a hope that 3,000 or 4,000 of the technicians may be found work in Turkey or elsewhere, but there is little prospect of employment for the clerks and civil servants. The future of 1,200 Jewish civilians is particularly precarious, owing to recent anti-semitic legislation. Only 200 can at present obtain permits for Palestine.

The soldiers are interned with their officers in twenty-one camps in Wallachia, accommodated in old army barracks in much the same conditions, except as regards liberty and occupation, as the Rumanian soldiers. Most of the larger camps we visited were fitted with sufficient showers to give the men one bath a week, though the water supply was not always adequate and it was not clear how fully the men availed themselves of the facilities. At Targu Jiu, Polish soldiers were at work on the construction of new barracks to house 12,000 of them, the intention being to concentrate the remainder in a second new camp at Targovisti. The existing barracks were for the most part cold, ill-lighted, and overcrowded, with inadequate sanitation and a sea of mud stretching between the buildings.

Clothing and Bedding.—In every camp there was a desperate shortage of clothing, shoes, blankets, and palliasses. Relatively few of the men had overcoats, and hardly any a change of underclothes. Many had only linen summer uniforms, although the weather was already becoming bitterly cold and wet. Time after time men stripped off their uniforms to show us the filthy, ragged, and verminous shirts they had worn night and day for six weeks. Shoes were wearing out, and in only one camp we saw tools and leather for repairing them. In some cases the men had separate beds, but in many they were sleeping on loose straw. Almost universally they complained of lice, for even with regular bathing it was impossible to keep free without changing and disinfecting clothing.

Health.—The civilians and the majority of the soldiers looked well fed and in good physical condition. An increasing number of respiratory infections, however, are occurring with the onset of the cold weather, and though medical attention is available there are practically no facilities for nursing, special care, or isolation within the camps themselves. (A Polish medical orderly told us there was no thermometer between two battalions.) The more serious cases (there have been few of these) are removed to hospital.

Malaria.—This is so common in many parts of Rumania, and so many of the Rumanians have had the aestivo-autumnal type, that it is not there regarded as a serious disease. The Poles, being infected in nearly all cases for the first time, however, were suffering considerably, particularly as adequate amounts of quinine were not always available in individual camps, although there is yet no shortage of quinine preparations in the country as a whole. In one camp of a thousand men the Rumanian doctor told me he was seeing four new cases of malaria a day, confirmed by blood examination, although fortunately the season was nearly at an end.

Typhus.—This is undoubtedly the chief epidemic danger in Rumania this winter. The classical exanthematic type is endemic in Bessarabia and parts of Poland, and was responsible for an enormous mortality in Rumania during the last war. In view of the extent of the Rumanian mobilization it was regarded as a serious possibility even before the Polish soldiers were added to the number. Immunization has not been found effective against this

type in Bessarabia, and its prevention appears therefore largely to resolve itself into the prompt provision of clothing and bedding, with the consequent possibility of effective delousing. So far no case has occurred.

Typhoid and Dysentery.—Extensive typhoid inoculations are being carried out both in the Rumanian army and among the Polish refugees. There are at present sufficient quantities of vaccine in the country. No case of true dysentery has occurred so far, one outbreak of gastro-enteritis in camp in the Dobrudja having been traced to the soldiers having eaten large quantities of unwashed grapes which had been sprayed with copper sulphate.

Refugees in Hungary

As in the case of the refugees entering Rumania, the main influx into Hungary happened during the third week of September, though extending over about four days. There was, however, considerable difference in the way they were distributed. Thus in order that the Polish army should not appear to be kept as military units the great majority of the officers were separated from the men and billeted together, being allowed much greater freedom. The men were also paid two filler a day, though this had to provide for certain necessities such as soap. (In Rumania the soldiers, as opposed to the officers, had no money whatever.) The soldiers were for the most part interned in barracks, but some were in derelict factories and other disused buildings. Many of the civilians were billeted privately, but many more were in separate camps, and there were even a number of women and children in some of the military camps. Among the more unfortunate were several hundred scouts and boys of scout age who were living as, and with, soldiers under particularly brutalizing conditions. The urgency of removing civilians from the military camps was, however, fully realized by the Government, and they were being withdrawn as fast as alternative accommodation could be found. It was planned to have one large camp for the women with young children, and a separate scout camp had already been started with the aid of the Hungarian scouts which would accommodate 250 boys at Somloszöllös.

In the case of both the civilians and the military, we were particularly struck with the great difference that existed between the best and the worst refugee conditions. Thus a civilian camp at Helemba was housed in what had been a newly built Czech barrack subsequently converted into a holiday home, and was admirable as regards cleanliness and equipment, although the invariable shortage of personal clothing existed. We later saw a military camp housed in a derelict vinegar factory in which 500 men were in almost complete darkness in a warehouse below ground level, sleeping on a concrete floor covered with loose straw. In another part of the same building were a number of women and children, six families inhabiting a room twenty-four feet square.

Health.—The health of the refugees in Hungary appeared better than of those in Rumania, largely owing to the absence of malaria. Similar cases of respiratory infection were occurring. In the military hospital at Kameron, which served camps containing over 5,000 Poles, we found only a comparatively small number of sick, all minor ailments with the exception of three cases of pneumonia and six men recovering from air raid injuries. The danger of typhus, though it cannot be altogether excluded, appears much less than in Rumania, the only cases in Hungary of recent years having been traceable to nomad gipsies coming over the Rumanian border. The same difficulties with regard to vermin infestation owing to lack of clothing apply as in Rumania, though probably more of the civilians became verminous in Rumania while staying in peasant cottages.

The Morale of the Refugees

If the lot of the civilian refugee is wretched, that of an interned army with no country to return to is still more

hopeless. Almost more than the material discomfort of the cold and lice, the men felt the forlorn misery of being cut off from the outside world, among strangers, however friendly these might be. A few letters were coming through from the German occupied territory, either direct or through the International Red Cross, but none from the Russian side, and there was hardly a man without constant anxiety for family or friends. Many indeed did not even know whether their wives and children were in Germany or Russia or Rumania or Hungary, and some families were even divided between the four countries.

Although sharing many of the same anxieties as the soldiers, the civilians were on the whole less dispirited, largely on account of their greater freedom and the knowledge that they could go elsewhere if opportunity arose. There were more signs of enterprise among them, some trying to find employment locally or abroad, others to make their circumstances more homelike. Thus in Ploesti, where a thousand civilians were concentrated, the president of the civilian Polish committee had drawn up plans for starting both an elementary and a commercial school, had selected the staff and curriculum, and worked out the minimum cost for essential equipment. We felt that there would be an immediate response if workshops, etc., could be established in civilian centres.

Among the military refugees there appeared to be a strikingly different spirit in different camps, which was by no means wholly dependent on material circumstances. That in which the men were clearly most contented was one which was fortunate in having both a Rumanian and a Polish colonel of exceptional qualities, but, though there was obviously thoughtfulness for the men and a general atmosphere of cleanliness and order, the basic provisions of the camp were little different from that in which the spirit was worst. Generally speaking, the men appeared dazed and apathetic, with a general sense of grievance for the march of events and their own miserable circumstances, which was apt to be visited irrationally on either their own or their foreign officers, and tended to make them uncooperative even in improving their own conditions. They were in no mood to appreciate the real sacrifices which the Rumanians and Hungarians were making to support them, and it was sad to see signs here and there that the initial friendliness with which their care had been undertaken was beginning to give way to exasperation.

In spite of such signs, however, we were repeatedly impressed by the sympathy and understanding of the Rumanian and Hungarian commandants of the various camps. The colonel in charge of five camps at Kameron said that he felt that many of the more troublesome men were in a state of war neurosis, and that the sudden disaster within a few weeks of their being mobilized had left them with none of the *esprit de corps* and discipline developed during a long campaign. He added that, next to blankets and underclothes, footballs, equipment for workshops, and school books were the first essentials.

Relief Organizations

A number of relief organizations are already at work in both countries, and in Hungary, where much is deputed to them by the Government, a co-ordinating committee has been set up consisting of representatives of the Hungarian Red Cross, the Polish Government, the Hungarian-Polish Society (a very active organization which has been largely responsible for the billeting of civilians), and the American Commission for Polish Relief. The last operates also in Rumania, in close association with the Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A., and is planning the large-scale establishment of "foyers" in the camps of both countries, to act as local centres for relief activities. The Save the Children Fund also has active representatives in Bucharest and Budapest. Other organizations such as the OSE are concentrating on special aspects of the refugee problem (for example, the fate of Jewish refugees), and much is being done by private individuals in both countries. The activities of the organizations not receiving funds from abroad are necessarily restricted.

Conclusions

1. An urgent need exists in both countries for warm clothing of all kinds, and particularly for underclothing, overcoats, blankets, shoes, and material for mattress covers. It is unlikely that any large quantity of these will be obtainable in Rumania owing to the requirements of the Rumanian army. (Sheep-skin coats, which can be obtained very cheaply in Rumania, are unfortunately too difficult to disinfect for their use to be justified.) In Hungary at least some of these requirements can be obtained within the country at rates that would make their shipment from abroad inadvisable (for example, shoes and some proportion of the blankets, overcoats, and underclothing).

2. It is most desirable that in both countries the existing facilities for regular bathing and for the disinfection of clothing of refugees should be extended as rapidly as possible. Where straw is not always immediately available, sufficient stocks should be kept to provide for the frequent changing and burning of infected straw from sleeping quarters.

3. There appears to be no immediate shortage of either drugs or vaccines, but a shortage is likely to occur if the refugee position remains unchanged. Quinine preparations in Rumania and disinfectants and soap in both countries are those of which there is most likely to be a dearth.

4. The desirability of equipping workshops and schools and concentrating older boys and students where they can continue their education is almost as great as providing physical necessities. A few textbooks in Polish (for example, for learning Rumanian and Hungarian) could be printed locally if money were available, and would be of the greatest value.

5. In view of there being many highly trained Poles and Polish-speaking Rumanians or Hungarians in both countries, it does not seem advisable to send out any extensive personnel from this country at the present time.

We wish to express our sincerest thanks for their help to the civil and military authorities and to the Red Cross in Rumania and Hungary; to the British Legation and Polish Embassy in Bucarest, and the British and Polish Legations in Budapest; to Professor Cambiescu, Professor Ciuca, and Dr. B. Johan; to Princess Caragea and Mlle Vajkai of the Save the Children Fund; to Mr. Paul Super and Mr. James Brown of the American Commission for Polish Relief; to Countess Romer of the Polish Society in Rumania; and to Princess Odescalchi-Andrassy and Countess Erzsébet Szápáry of the Hungarian-Polish Society.

Local News

INDIA

The Campaign against Leprosy

The sixty-third annual report of the Mission to Lepers appears with the title "The Inherent Promise" and relates to the work accomplished all over the world, and especially in India, which country has always been one of the most cultivated fields of this interdenominational and international organization. It is announced that a record number of lepers is now being helped, and special progress is noted in the report in respect of the intensive treatment of the disease in young children, where the benefit is more obvious. This extension of the programme of the organization has been especially pushed in India, where also progress has been made in the care and treatment of infected children on a larger scale and to the colonization of young people from the leper homes in which infection has been prevented; provision has been made in the Central Provinces for such children and for

arrested cases in which there is now a reasonable hope of no recrudescence of the disease. The provision of the new home for lepers in Fyzabad in the United Provinces was rendered possible largely by subscriptions raised locally for that specific purpose, and a co-ordinated scheme of treatment, including colonization possibilities, is now coming into being. The Chandkuri Leper Home in the Central Provinces, which celebrated its fortieth anniversary last year, has treated some five thousand lepers, and seven hundred healthy children of leper parentage have taken their place in the healthy community. The report expresses the view that hydnocarpus oil and its esters administered intramuscularly, subcutaneously, and intradermally remain the most valuable therapeutic agents. For improving and maintaining the general health of these patients the diet must be liberal, well balanced, and rich in vitamins. Occupational therapy is highly esteemed, and it is important to eliminate intercurrent diseases. This emphasis on nutrition, which, it is remarked, has sometimes been ignored with unfortunate results, dates from the beginning of the campaign against leprosy; without an adequate diet drug therapy nearly always fails to be of much value. The report contains a reference to a case of one leper home in which the patients denied themselves meat and sugar for one month in the absence of the missionary so that the considerable amount of money thus raised might go to the famine-stricken Bhils in the Indore district. Similar forms of practical gratitude shown by leper patients are not uncommon elsewhere in India, and the popularity of the campaign is growing steadily.

Obstetrics in India

The second All-India Obstetric and Gynaecological Congress, held in Bombay last year, was attended by delegates and visitors from more than fifty different localities. The proceedings have now been published. In his address of welcome Sir Mangaldas Mehta traced the origin and growth of maternity work in Bombay. The first maternity home, containing twenty beds, was opened in 1849. To-day there are eighty-three public and charitable institutions and nursing homes with a total of 1,308 beds. Of 37,795 births registered in the city during 1937, 27,758, or 73.4 per cent., took place in maternity institutions. For the same year the maternal death rate was 4.4 per 1,000, while the infant death rate had diminished by nearly a quarter from the rate of 1920, when only 20 per cent. of women were confined in maternity institutions. In his presidential address Dr. B. D. Mukherji of Calcutta, reviewing general conditions throughout the country, deplored the ignorance and superstition of the average Indian mother and the abject poverty of the masses. In most of the Indian villages the only medical help available for the mother is that of the untrained midwife or "dhai." Dr. Mukherji also maintained that even in urban areas the position was far from satisfactory, owing to the dearth of obstetric specialists in the smaller towns. Unless employed in Government service these men were obliged to congregate in large cities, such as Calcutta, Madras, or Bombay, in order to obtain adequate opportunity for remunerative work. Dr. Mukherji advocated the establishment of rural maternity centres, affiliated to special hospitals in the district and subdivisional towns; also the provision of mobile dispensaries for obstetric and gynaecological work in rural areas. The congress devoted its attention chiefly to the questions of the toxæmias of pregnancy and carcinoma of the cervix. Among other papers read that of Dr. D. M. Satur on post-puerperal neuritis appears to be of considerable interest. Dr. Satur's patients, drawn from an impoverished community in the Andhra district, near Vizagapatam, lived on a diet consisting chiefly of polished rice. The lack of essential food factors was further accentuated by a restriction of the diet during the latter half of pregnancy and a period of three months after delivery. The neuritis, bearing some