

Has Switzerland enough to eat?

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At the moment there are about 11,000 Russian internees in our country. They are mostly former prisoners of war who escaped from German camps at the time of the Reich's collapse. They have all been well treated and have been taken good care of. They are enjoying the same privileges which according to international conventions we have granted all foreign soldiers who have come to seek refuge in our country. On June 16 I saw about a hundred of these Russians accompanied by 8 unarmed Swiss soldiers taking a walk in the streets of Berne and singing their national songs. They were all properly dressed in new uniforms and looked extremely healthy. Why are they still in Switzerland? Why have they not yet gone back to their own country from which they have been separated for such a long time? Our authorities have declared themselves willing to let them go. There is no obstacle in their way if they want to do so. We have never tried to retain them and only in the interests of the countries which they will have to pass we have submitted them to a sanitary quarantine, an elementary hygienic measure whose value cannot be discussed. If they are still in Switzerland, it is because they don't know by which route they would be able to travel home. Another reason is that our neighboring countries and the military authorities who are in charge of them have not put at our disposal the means of transportation which are indispensable for these repatriations. The difficulties have certainly not their source with the Swiss authorities. They are caused by circumstances which are beyond our control. Nevertheless, all these Russian internees are welcome in our country and our people have received them with friendliness. We have done everything in our power to take good care of them and to cure the effects of the moral and physical hardships they have had to endure in German prison camps. We understand their wish to return home and also the wish of the Soviet government to see these men back again on Russian territory. We never, in the least, opposed ourselves against these very natural feelings for we are respecting international law as well as we decide for individual freedom. The steps taken by our authorities have led to no positive results so far but they will not fail to do so if the Russian diplomacy will lend a hand to it. This voice would undoubtedly be heard. Wouldn't it be much simpler to straighten out this problem in direct contact without intermediaries instead of communicating government decisions through officious radio stations? Switzerland would be willing, as the Russian refusal last November has changed nothing in our plans and intentions. She would be glad to meet a similar attitude in her far way interlocutors. The Russian authorities would then find that in this matter no reproaches can be made to Switzerland.

HAS SWITZERLAND ENOUGH TO EAT?

Food rations in our country have grown very small, and our people are eagerly expecting new imports. The Federal statistical office in Berne has published several most interesting figures, comparing the food situation in our country during the first and the second world war. They reveal above all that in the first war no major restrictions were necessary during the first year and that also in this war 1940 was still a relatively good year. In January 1917 sugar had still been free. In December of the same year, the ration had been 750 grams. In January 1940, however, the monthly quantity of sugar allowed per head was 2000 grams and in December 1000 grams. Today, the figure has even dropped to 500 grams. Spaghetties, macaronies and noodles had still been unrationed until late in the summer 1917, and in 1918, the monthly ration had varied from 350 to 400 grams. Today we only get 250 grams. The present bread ration is about as high as in the last years of the first war. Cheese rations are even a bit higher. But meat had not been rationed at all in the first war while today it has become a very scarce article. Edible fats and oils had only been rationed in the last month of the first war and during a short period afterwards. Today the foodstuffs which have grown rarest in our country are just fat and oil. If Switzerland could import more fats, a most important food problem would be solved for there are sufficient quantities of potatoes in the country.

Switzerland would like to extend her relief and aid actions. After the departure of the internees and refugees in our country, she would like to welcome new categories of them, especially a great number of undernourished Dutch children. Reports from Holland continue to say: save our children who are weak and underfed and need great care. But our country's charitable actions create the great problems of food supply. Nevertheless, we are determined to accept further tens of thousands of needy people.

Nobody can say that there is not enough to eat in Switzerland. But our responsible authorities are not only thinking of the present moment, they are planning for the coming winter, they are calculating with our food supply, with the shortage of fats and oils and with our dwindling stocks of foodstuffs. The end of war has not rendered the tasks of the war economic offices less difficult, because today a strong urge for freedom from restrictions makes itself felt in our country and a certain impatience for the food supply to normalize itself again. This impatience is continuously kept under control by our authorities who still have no guarantee that the promised imports will really arrive. Today the question of transporting goods is almost more difficult to solve than the problem of buying goods. There are goods enough on the world's markets, but there is a definite lack of shipping space and port facilities to unload them and of communication lines to and from the ports to our country. The best example of Switzerland's dependency on foreign imports is our bread supply. In normal years our country produces about 17,000 freight cars of ten tons of cereals. Before the war we imported every year about 43,000 carloads. This explains the worries of our war office for cereals when at the end of last year imports of cereals completely stopped.

Every report on new facilities for our imports arouses new hopes. It is reckoned that most foodstuffs will still have to be rationed during part of 1946. The coming month will show how the situation is developing and how much the crops will yield. So far only the rationing of dried eggpowder from America has been abolished. This article, however, is expensive and has never become a popular foodstuff. The first great relief in the food situation will only come when the fats and oils which Switzerland has stored in Spain and Portugal will arrive in our country. But even after that there will be many problems to be solved in our national supply system. Coal is one of the main problems among them. Whether the European coal producers will be able to meet the joint plan for the exploitation and distribution of coal on our continent remains still to be seen. Experts declare that if the various coal producing countries will not come to a final agreement, not much may be expected in this field.

THE SWISS WORKERS AT THE END OF THE WAR.

If we compare the situation of the workingman at the end of this war, the end of the first war, we find that in the Fall 1918, the Swiss workers had been in fierce opposition to the state and society in general, having even organized a general strike and having fought against army and federal Council. Today the workers have a representative in the Federal Council which is a coalition government. There are no strikes, no unemployment and the workers are among the most loyal soldiers. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to think that everything is perfect.

The workers have a number of difficult years behind them. The general cost of living has increased by 53% and in most trades this increase has only partly been equalized by higher wages. Many workers' families have to struggle very hard to make the money last for the week. If this situation has not had strong repercussions on our domestic situation, this is mainly due to the fact that so far labour has been in great demand and that no one has had to be without work. The number of families where almost each member has its own job is considerable.

The Swiss workers are more or less in constant negotiations with the state and their employers, having learned that in this way much can be gained. Moreover, they are making comparisons between their own situation and that of the workers in other countries. Our rationing system takes into consideration the requirements of our working class and in the cities like Basle, Zurich, Berne and others the workers and their representatives are either in the majority or have at least an important word to say and are thus able to co-operate in the establishment of social work and in the reduction of social differences.

In the first world war there were rich people who could get anything money could buy. This time, rationing is much more rigorous and there is greater justice for all. Furthermore, our system of wage compensation for mobilized soldiers has also greatly contributed to a more peaceful situation in our country.