

More Biafra and Czechoslovakia news from Switzerland

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MORE BIAFRA AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA NEWS FROM SWITZERLAND

On 12th September, the International Red Cross Committee reported that they had 126 people in their service, who were concerned with the distribution of food and medical material. They were under the leadership of Dr. Gerhart Schuerch (*see under appointments*) in Lagos. The party was divided into fourteen groups (social, medical, technical, etc.). The report said that Red Cross had two DC-4 aircraft, two helicopters, 80 lorries, several landrovers and two boats (500 tons each). At that moment, 3,000 tons of material were at the central depot in Lagos, and in the course of September, another 6,500 tons were expected to arrive. Ten boats on hire were used to transport the goods to Lagos. The Red Cross are assisted by several other organisations, such as UNICEF, the Nigerian Red Cross, etc.

In his own report, Dr. Schuerch said that the main campaign would start only once the surrounded refugee masses could be reached by road. He also stated that the neutrality of the Swiss helped him in his task. But that even more important — “we Swiss are also white” — is the respect for Black Africa and the full devotion and effort of the individual.

On the other hand, Ambassador Lindt (*see under appointments*) has the difficult task of negotiating with the Nigerians. The Swiss Government remains in touch with them direct or through Dr. Lindt.

Meanwhile, the various campaigns in aid of Biafran and other victims of the war, goes on in Switzerland. Millions of francs have been collected by the “Glücks-kette” organised by Swiss Radio and TV, by the R.C. “Caritas”, by “Terre des Hommes” (one anonymous donor gave them half a million francs), by “HEKS” (Evangelical Churches), etc. The owner of a large hotel in Lucerne served his guests a low-calory meal one day and sent in the difference in cost: Fr.4,656.—. Two Zurich youths sold pictures in aid of the hungry in Biafra and collected Fr.10,000.— in three days. And so forth.

Biafran children have been evacuated to Gabon by “Terre des Hommes”, and arrangements for further evacuation are constantly being made, so for instance for 81 British, French and German nationals (18 women and 61 children) to Switzerland on 20th September.

* * *

As was already reported, a special meeting was arranged on the Ruetli on the Swiss Federal Day of Prayer. 800 Czechoslovaks and as many Swiss gathered, and various speeches were made, also by the Czech Minister of the Church. The Czech National Anthem was sung, and at the end, the Altdorf Tell Festival actors performed the *Rütlischwur* scene, unfortunately in driving rain.

On 22nd September, 100 Czech nationals met in Berne to hear a report by a Czech government delegation which asked their compatriots to return.

Prior to the opening of the autumn session of the Swiss Parliament, the Federal Council received a report that 4,500 Czechs were in Switzerland, of whom 350 had

so far asked for political asylum. More will be reported on this in our next issue.

The above-mentioned figure of political refugees rose to 950 by the beginning of October.

Switzerland also helped with South-Korean orphans who have been placed with foster parents. Help for the 75,000 victims of the Iranian earthquake has been forthcoming from many quarters, and several Cantonal Governments have given money to the Red Cross, whilst the Federal Council have donated a first 100,000 francs. The Church Help organisations, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, started active assistance immediately after the catastrophe happened.

Help for the Red Cross in Vietnam continues, as well as for the refugees in the Near East.

[A.T.S.]

BAD WEATHER

A decidedly dry June with almost tropical periods was followed by plenty of storms early in July, which caused severe flooding in the Jura, the Valais and many other parts of the country. The heat gave way to cool weather and snow in higher parts, and damage due to hailstorms was considerable to crops. The Ticino vegetables did not ripen in time, and thousands of kilos of *zucchetti* rotted away.

Storms happened not only in the first half of July, but again in early August; a very severe hurricane-like storm with a deluge of rain caused bad flooding and damage in Olten, and there were floods in the Aargau, the Emmental, and in Zurich Communes. In Basle, the cloud density was 91%, the highest since 1912, when the average for the first ten days in August was 82%. There was not even a third of the normal number of hours of sunshine. In the Grisons Valley of Schanfigg, there was an earth tremor which was felt in several parts of the country. Fortunately, the Vaudois vines were not damaged by the bad weather.

The second half of August was no better, and everywhere there were complaints about the cold weather. There were more earth tremors and snow surprised hundreds of cows on the Valais alpine pastures.

Heavy rainfalls happened again in early September, followed by severe floods and earth subsidence. In some parts of the Grisons, snow fell down to 700m. Whole areas were under water, and the damage which farmers have suffered has not yet been assessed. The fire brigades have had to work overtime in many Swiss towns.

Going back to 1967, the Thurgau announced that damage had been caused amounting to 1,647 million francs, the worst year on record.

The fund for the sufferers from avalanches last winter, has been given a special boost thanks to the balloon flight in its aid on 6th August. “*Helvetia*” left Davos, piloted by Curt Meyer (Zurich). It landed in Austria 5½ hours later, carrying 3,000 specially stamped cards.

(By courtesy of Agence
Télégraphique Suisse.)

More news has since come in, and the situation was most critical in many parts of the country. It was a near-catastrophe. We shall give some more details in the next issue. ED.