

Behind the headlines

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BEHIND THE HEADLINES.**Swiss Aid to Europe.**

By Dr. HERMANN BÖSCHENSTEIN.

The Swiss people have once more been invited to contribute towards the Swiss Aid to Europe. This collection coincides with that in favour of the people and villages which have suffered from the avalanches. Unquestionably, the fund for the Swiss Aid to Europe will suffer to some extent from the concurrent action, which is of a national character, for the relief of our own people. And yet, the Swiss people realise within their own security, that there are still some 12 million refugees in Europe who are deserving of all the help which the firmly established Europeans can give them. In Switzerland, this help is financed partly by voluntary contributions and partly by grants from the State.

In the very forefront of Swiss aid to Europe is to be found a very constructively organised scheme to assist refugees and to facilitate emigration. In addition there is an organisation which takes in old and sick Displaced Persons, the so-called hard-core cases. Switzerland has declared her readiness to accept 200 such distressed persons. Among them are to be found a large group of men and women suffering from tuberculosis. Aid to Europe, is a "cover" organisation, consisting of the Catholic "Caritas" the Social-Democratic Workers Association, the Relief Association belonging to the Evangelical Churches in Switzerland and the Union of Swiss Jewish Welfare Organisations. It is hoped to obtain a million francs from the collection.

In 1950, assistance was rendered to Greece, where 170,000 children were provided with footwear, to Germany, where special attention was given to Youth Welfare and to the question of helping settlers, and to Austria, where, in view of the predominantly peasant elements to be found among the refugees it was mostly a question of helping with the building of settlements and of emigration. An interesting project is that which intends to arrange for the settlement of 500 families, all farmers from the Donau-Schwabian region, in Central Brazil. "Caritas" has already obtained the authorisation for the immigration of 100,000 persons who have been evicted from their homes, but everyone who has ever dealt with this question knows how often the best plans for colonisation are shattered, if they are not elaborated beforehand with the greatest care.

The settlement in view requires a capital of six million Swiss francs, and it is evident that it is quite impossible for the refugees themselves to realise this project. Only a World Organisation like the I.R.O. can carry out schemes of this scope, and even then, it can only assist a small fraction of all those homeless people who are the victims of this terrible displacement of persons, which marks our era.

In a warm-hearted, personal appeal, Mr. Edouard de Steiger, the President of the Swiss Confederation has called upon the Swiss people to give generously, as is their wont. He referred them to publications issued by the Swiss Aid to Europe, from which they would learn that in Germany alone there are still some 300,000 families — that is to say 1.4 million persons — who are living in army huts, bunkers and camps.

In order to provide decent living accommodation for all the bombed out and evicted families it will be necessary to build 5 million homes. Swiss Aid to Europe gives material support to the building activities undertaken by these homeless people themselves. The stream of refugees from the East, however, continues to pour in. An interesting experiment has given excellent results: this is the establishment of weaving-loom in 90 villages in Northern Greece, which provide work for the needy inhabitants. That is money which has been well and sensibly invested. Finally, collaboration on the part of the Swiss Aid to Europe with similar international Relief Organisations is of particular significance. Chiefly among these is the UNICEF, the Relief Fund for Children attached to the UNO, and also the International Refugee Organisation, to both of which Switzerland contributes considerable sums.

All these organisations pursue the same aim, i.e., they strive to achieve a permanent solution of the terrible refugee problem which is a heritage from the war and post-war years. In no case must the refugees be allowed to feel that they have been abandoned to their own devices — for this would have a paralysing effect on their morale — but must be shown that those who have been able to preserve their home and family, are interested in their welfare. It is touching to know that the inhabitants of Northern Greece declare that the Helbetikoi, as they call the Swiss, are the only people who have taken the trouble to come to them in their mountains and render practical assistance. So, in the Spring of 1951, whilst the refugees continue to pour in from the East seeking for asylum in the West, the collection in favour of Swiss Aid to Europe also continues to proceed steadily.

Once more a call is being made on the generosity of a people, who are willing to bring fresh sacrifices both as regards time and money for the defence of their own freedom and independence and are ready, at the same time, to practice an active, helpful, truly fraternal neutrality.

Nouvelle Société Helvétique (LONDON GROUP)

OPEN MEETING

Tuesday, 1st May, 1951, 7 p.m.

At the Vienna Café,

Berkeley Arcade, Baker Street, N.W.1.

Lecture in English illustrated by coloured lantern slides, by

Dr. A. TISSIERES,
Molteno Institute, Cambridge,

on

"EXPEDITION TO THE HIMALAYAS"

All Swiss and Friends are heartily welcome.