

# Migration Miracle - -

by George Murray

(This is the fifth of a series of articles written for the Canadian Weekly Newspapers Association by the editor of the Pictou Advocate, now touring Europe.)

Fallingbatal, Germany — Food standards in displaced persons camps are just above the subsistence level. The International Refugee Organization has established a daily ration of 2,230 calories as a desirable minimum (the average daily consumption in Canada is about 3,500 calories) but even this standard is sometimes difficult to maintain. Special food supplements are given to children, pregnant and nursing women, the sick, and heavy workers, all carefully calculated.

Feeding in most camps is communal. In the food store everything is neatly stacked and tidy, and the huge brown German-baked loaves are fresh and of good quality. The contents of the bins tally with the records available.

In the kitchen, large boilers give off clouds of steam and red faced cooks and assistants are dashing to and fro. In one boiler stew is bubbling, there are plenty of potatoes, chunks of meat, and vegetables, and the whole boiling cauldron gives off an appetizing aroma. Bread is sliced in a machine and dollops of margarine and jam are smeared on the freshly cut slices.

In another boiler is coffee substitute, the notorious German "ersatz" variety, and already milk and sugar are being added. The menu is stew, bread, jam and margarine and a mug of ersatz coffee. Not much of a meal, perhaps, but the best that can be done. The dining room is a huge room in which tables and forms are laid out in orderly rows. The walls are bleak but the monotony is broken here and there by gay Estonian and Latvian flags. There is no luxury but the barrack tables are cleanly scrubbed and the whole impression given is one of clean utility. Plates, spoons and mugs will be brought by the D.P.'s themselves, and by the door are tubs of hot water for washing up.

At the other end of the dining room is a smaller kitchen where the children's meals are prepared. They get a supplementary issue, and the food is therefore cooked separately. Here the meal is much the same, but there is fresh fruit in addition to the stew, bread and jam, and vats of cocoa.

What else is there in the camp? Well, there is the school, and the children look extremely well. Little blond girls with ribbons and pig-tails, wearing light woollen jumpers, and close-cropped boys. They learn in their native language but English is also taught for a few hours a week. Nearly all of them have spent a fortnight in the World's Y.M.C.A. summer camp where the tents were pitched on the banks of a stream in a beautiful part of the country a few miles away. At these camps, organized sport takes place, and there is a campfire in the evening with community singing. The YMCA provides additional food from its own resources. It is quite obvious that the change has done the children good.

There is also a kindergarten and in addition forty children from the camp are attending secondary school in a camp a few miles away. The headmaster tells us that 15 persons from the camp are at a vocational training school. This is very important. Few opportunities exist for the professionally qualified D.P.'s. Skilled tradesmen are favoured.

Vocational training also fulfils a useful purpose as there are training courses of short duration designed to refresh skills which have been dulled through disuse during

the war years, or to provide elementary training for young workers. In this camp the D.P.'s themselves conduct a good deal of informal "on the job" training, and the camp shoemaker, carpenter, electrician and tailor for example, are engaged in training aspirants for their own type of work.

At the other side of the barrack square is the camp hospital and dispensary, presided over by the DPACCS nurse. It is big enough for 20 patients and has a medical inspection room for daily patients requiring consultation and treatment. There is also a dental clinic which caters to neighbouring camps as well as this one. An ambulance is available for transporting patients to hospitals when necessary. The hospitals used are German and D.P.'s who are socially insured are able to use them free. Hospital bills for others are met by D.P. Division through JRO funds.

It is with an air of pride that the doctor shows us through the five wards, each having four beds, which make up the sick bay. The linen is spotless and by the open windows are vases of huge roses, yellow and red. The dispensary is equally clean and is remarkably well stocked with drugs.

In the health program, D.P. Division and JRO utilize to the full the services of the D.P.'s themselves to maintain a high standard of health. The aim is to prevent disease as well as cure it, and to this end the DPACCS doctor inspects lavatories and drains, tests water in the camp once a week and carries out immunization of the D.P.'s as a routine measure against epidemic typhoid, diphtheria, and against epidemic typhus, cholera, yellow fever when necessary. Clinics for mothers, special centres for underweight children and a comprehensive tuberculosis survey using mass radiography are among other health measures in operation.

Statistically, in terms of birth and death rates, incidence of disease and other criteria, the level of health of the DPACCS as a whole compares favourably with that of the western European nations in the immediate post-war years. It must be admitted, however, that the low caloric value of the food has produced in some areas lowered resistance to sickness and an increase in infant mortality and tuberculosis.

The DPACCS supervisor, the fourth Brit-her of the team, is giving out clothing in the clothing store. Each camp inhabitant has a clothing card on which issues are recorded. If the state of a person's clothing, coupled with proof on the card that he or she has had no issue for a considerable time, justifies the issue of further garments, then the person is called to the store with others in a similar plight and issue is made. There is a queue of about 40 D.P.'s outside, while inside a storeman is handing out trousers to the foremost man. It is like the army and fitting out recruits at the quartermaster's store. The recipient stretches out his hands to indicate that his trousers are too big. The supervisor, an ex-army sergeant, deals with the complaint in time-honoured fashion.

"Got a wife, haven't you?" he shouts. "Or a girl friend, haven't you? Tell 'er to knock a bit off the bottom, can't you? Now then, next."

The Estonian understands not a word, but appreciates the futility of argument and humbly accepts his trousers. An entry is made on his clothing card and business continues.

In the store itself, neatly stacked on shelves, ranging from battledress (dyed blue to corsets. Each pile has its stack card and we check a few items to see if the pile agrees with the figure on the card. Clothing has

a high market value in Germany these days. Next to the clothing store is the amenity store where such things as sweets, cigarettes, toilet soap and razor blades are kept. Each D.P. receives a few items each month. The Voluntary Society, in this camp a team of the Salvation Army also gives out a few supplies of clothing and supplementary food to the really needy. They help in welfare matters and organize serving and cooking classes. The DPACCS commander says they are a real asset and he is very glad of their services.

On the welfare side the camp is not too badly off. A children's playground with swings, see-saws, and roundabouts has been improvised. There is a Y.M.W.C.A. room with library, magazines, chess and other games, where the unemployed can sit at tables and while away the long hours. There is a Boy Scout and Girl Guides room, and a large hall in which a stage has been erected. Here visiting concert parties are housed, and frequently operas such as "Madame Butterfly" and "The Barber of Seville" are performed in improvised costumes by former members of the Latvian State Opera.

There is a canteen where beer, food and household necessities may be bought by those lucky enough to have work and enough money to pay for them.

The church, fashioned out of a disused instruction hall, is a miracle of improvisation and it is obvious that much work has gone into its construction. Superimposed on the dark wood of the altar is a gleaming cross which as close inspection reveals is fashioned out of the metal tops of beer bottles, burnished like silver. The hangings are embroidered in Baltic style, their rich colors lending a glow to the gloomy interior. Candelsticks and candelabra are elaborately carved out of wood and their heavy, medieval style is typically Baltic. Altogether the atmosphere is one of peace and must act like balm on the troubled soul of Europe's homeless outcasts.

What about the D.P.'s themselves? As we have seen, the camp houses nearly 1,500 mixed Latvian and Estonian people. They look very much like other people except on concert nights when many dress in their wonderful national costumes. Do not imagine that they have gaunt faces, shaved heads, staring eyes and cadaverous bodies clothed in the shapeless striped garb of the concentration camp. That is a misconception which persists even to this day, and the fact that these victims of totalitarianism are sometimes painted as supporters of it. No, they are normal human beings searching for a normal human life with future security to bring up their children in freedom. They come from every walk of life and are a typical cross-section of their Baltic homelands.

Their living quarters are the biggest disappointment in the camp. Barracks have the large dormitory type of room and unfortunately the camp population consists of several families, many more in fact than numbers of rooms. Consequently more than one family must be accommodated in each room. The camp work services team has done its best to afford a little privacy by erecting fibre board partitions but materials are in short supply, and in many rooms all we find are rough curtains made from blankets. The general impression is of overcrowding and when there are small children in the family the din is appalling. If their love of freedom was less than their love of comfort these people would pack up tomorrow and head for home. Under such living conditions in the camp, neighbourliness and human charity are strained to the utmost, and it is matter of wonder that there are not more fights, more promiscuity, and more divorces.

Despite all this, the rooms are clean without the disorderliness

which might be expected. It says much for the Baltic housewife that she practices her good housekeeping under these disheartening conditions. That is roughly it. There is no time to visit the other camp under the control of this DPACCS, consisting of wooden huts housing 800 Lithuanians.

From camps such as these the resettlers proceed to the Resettlement Processing Centres, where living conditions are much the same, but where rigorous medical tests of the whole family are carried out. Here too are American, Canadian, Australian and other selection missions who examine employment credentials and apply strict security tests.

Provided the D.P. successfully passes these tests and conforms to other immigration criteria, he then passes to Shifting Camps, where customs clearance normally takes place, and where he might work for two or three weeks before travelling on to the embarkation camp and finally the ships.

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