

Vienna Shelters Hungarian Refugee Children: Austrian School Unit ...

Austrian School Unit Tries to Heal Scars Left by Tragedies

By JOHN MacCORMAC

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VIENNA, Nov. 21—To have escaped alone from Hungary to Austria a year ago; to have sought a new future in three countries in two continents and no one to find oneself back in Austria and still without a home—that would be an experience trying enough for an adult.

For the 10-year-old boy who sits on the steps of a rocky villa in the Vienna woods and watches his comrades play, it has been shattering. It shows in his withdrawn attitude and the fear behind his eyes.

If the fear is slowly abating, it is to the credit of the International Rescue Committee. A home that once housed Alexander Girardi, a celebrated Austrian comedian of the Emperor Francis Joseph era at the turn of the century, has been turned into a boarding school for refugee children who have found it hardest to adjust themselves to life on this side of the Iron Curtain.

Tragedy and Disillusionment

Sometimes it has been made hard by such experiences as that of the little girl who was found still weeping beside the body of her mother, shot by Hungarian frontier guards a day earlier as she was escaping.

With children old enough to have fought with his arms against Communist enslavement it may be the result of simple disillusionment with a Western world that has seemed to offer them in camp life only another set of restraints with no compensating opportunities.

Whatever the problem, it is being solved here with love, skill and care. The school has forty children, two from Yugoslavia and the rest from Hungary. Eighteen are classed as "disturbed" and in need of special care.

The school also has one full and one part-time psychologist and a consulting psychiatrist in addition to two teachers, a "house father" and two "house mothers."

Its director, Paul Heber, studied anthropology at Columbia University and worked for the Department of Correction in New York as a rehabilitation counselor. Like the rest of the staff, he is Hungarian-born.

Some of the disturbed children are suffering only from "camp neurosis," the uncertain-



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Gyula Komos teaches the children geography at the school by means of a picture puzzle

ty born of being shifted from one camp to another with no apparent hope of a permanent abode.

Most readily explicable was the mental state of eighteen boys and girls who participated with their parents in an ill-fated colonization experiment in the Dominican Republic. Altogether, 581 escaped Hungarians were recruited here last spring. They were told that they would be given land on condition that they worked it.

When they arrived, according to their story, they were put to work clearing out jungle under military guard. When they had cleared one strip they were moved on to another. Meanwhile, they lived in grass huts without sanitation and received starvation wages.

They say they managed to smuggle out letters with the help of foreign seamen and thus to acquaint the authorities in Vienna with their plight. About 320 of them have been brought

back to Austria under the sponsorship of the Intergovernmental Committee on European Migration.

They blame a fellow Hungarian, Gen. Sandor Kovacs, for many years military aide to Hector Bienvenido Trujillo, President of the Dominican Republic. They assert General Kovacs received a commission for each immigrant.

Stay Is Limited

The most disturbed child in the school is one of those who returned. A year ago he made his way by himself from Budapest to Austria and eventually was accepted by Portugal. Then his father escaped, asked that his son be returned to Austria and emigrated with him to the Dominican Republic. Like other children who went through this experience, the boy came back with a skin disease and sores resulting from malnutrition. There were deeper emotional scars.

"What we tell the children is that they have a home with us here, where they can stay as long as they want," said Mr. Heber. "Meanwhile we prepare them for sponsorship abroad or for integration into Austrian life."

Nearly 3,000 Hungarian children came to Austria without their parents. Only about 150 of them became social problems and some of these have gone back to Hungary. The Hungarian regime, through its secret police organization, is trying to get the children back by any means.

One of its methods was tried on a boy. When he received a letter apparently signed by his grandmother telling him that his father had died and asking him to return for the funeral, he knew it was a lie, since his grandmother had had a stroke and could not write. Later it was learned that his father was alive.