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Vienna Sad Year After Liberation.

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Newsletter:

Vienna Sad Year After Liberation

By Klaus Mann
Staff Writer

(First in a series of
articles from Vienna)

VIENNA—This city recently celebrated the first anniversary of its liberation. It was quite an occasion, with plenty of flags—most of them red—Soviet Army parades, ceremonies, speeches and solemn editorials in all the local papers. Everyone in Vienna was ready to tell you how happy he was to be liberated. Yet Vienna was not a happy city.

The gloomy aspect of the Austrian capital is not primarily due to physical destruction. Having seen the ruined cities of Germany, I found Vienna comparatively well-preserved, even though some famous buildings—the Opera, the Burgtheater, St. Stephen's Cathedral—have been damaged. It's the people, rather than the city, who look pitiful and depressed.

There are many difficulties confronting the population—political, social and moral; but by far the most urgent problem is food. To 99 out of 100 Viennese, the question of how to obtain some bread or a few potatoes means infinitely more, right now, than the possession of South Tyrol or the outcome of any elections.

CALORIE RATION LOW

Clearly, the food situation in Vienna has reached a critical point. The average daily calorie ration is now only 900, although an absolute minimum of 1,250 (originally 1,550) calories has been guaranteed by the Allied Control Council.

About 300,000 tons of food supplies will have to be imported before the end of summer to maintain this low ration scale until the next harvest. Viennese are being told that considerable quantities of UNRRA food are on the way from the U.S. and Argentina. For the present, however, conditions remain pretty grim.

If it's not yet starvation, it's certainly not far from it. There are U.S. Weighing Stations scattered throughout the American occupied districts. According to official reports, weight standard of various age groups have remained fair, "except among children 6 to 18 years of age and older people." That may be so; but the death rate in Vienna has increased alarmingly, and most of the people you meet have that hollow-eyed, tired look—the look of the hungry.

Herbert Hoover's recent visit to Vienna aroused a good deal of hope and curiosity among undernourished natives. Would the ex-President live up to his Santa Claus-like reputation? Would he bring in his private plane billions of tinned calories? Was prosperity around the corner?

HOOVER APPEARS BORED

I attended Hoover's press conference at the fashionable Hotel Bristol, now a billet for U. S. senior officers and distinguished visitors. Seated between Gen. Mark W. Clark and the General's political advisor, Mr. Erhardt, the former U.S. President looked like an extremely bored old man.

He told us in a dry, matter-of-fact way that Austrians didn't have enough to eat, and that the Americans would have to do something about it. There would be no rationing in the U.S., he said, but the measures to be applied will, in Hoover's opinion, prove more stringent and more effective than any rationing.

Hoover failed to explain just what kind of measures he had in mind. He promised, however, that there will be help from Uncle Sam. All Viennese newspapers announced the news in bold, joyful headlines.

The people of Vienna certainly need some kind of psychological lift. They don't have much fun these days. No wine, no waltzes, no "Schnitzel," "Strudel" or "Gulasch." Most of their beloved café houses are requisitioned.

As for Vienna's celebrated amusement area in the "Prater," it happens to be one of the city's most cruelly beaten spots. Only one colossal ferris wheel managed to survive the general destruction—a ghostly reminder.

But if conditions in Vienna are dreary and at times disquieting, they are by no means catastrophic, and may never become so, unless we allow constant famine to undermine the morale of the population.