

SERIOUS PROBLEM

FACES CHARITIES

Distress Now as Great as in Worst Period of Last Winter

AUSTRIANS ARE MENACE

Five to Eight Thousand Destitute Reservists May Make Trouble Unless They Are Cared for

That the present conditions of unemployment and hardship among the poorer classes in Montreal are as bad as they were during the worst period of last winter, which was exceptionally hard, was the statement made yesterday by Mr. Rufus D. Smith, secretary of the Charity Organization Society, in conversation with The Gazette.

The problem of dealing with the unemployed among the Austrians of Montreal, who number from five to eight thousand, was also mentioned by Mr. Smith as being a serious one, but the Charity Organization Society, after receiving numerous requests for assistance from Austrians, decided that the matter of relieving their distress was not within the scope of the society, but should be dealt with in some way by the Federal Government. A letter was accordingly sent to the Government describing the situation in Montreal, and requesting that some official action be taken in dealing with unemployed aliens. Pending some reply from the Government, the Austrian applicants are being referred to the Meurling Institute.

A special meeting of the executive of the society with Board of Trade representatives, in order that the matter may also be dealt with locally, has been arranged for Monday next, as a result of the following letter sent by Mr. Smith to Mr. R. J. Dale, president of the Board of Trade:

"The Charity Organization Society would like to bring to the attention of the Montreal Board of Trade the serious distress among the many Austrian reservists in Montreal.

"For some time previous to the opening of the war, considerable numbers of these men were coming to this organization for assistance and for deportation to their homes. Since the opening of the war many have come asking for bread and a place to sleep. No doubt you are aware that a deputation of Austrians, introduced by the American consul-general, Mr. Bradley, has recently interviewed the city authorities regarding the opening of soup kitchens.

"We probably have somewhere between five to eight thousand of these men, mostly single, and the majority reservists, in the city. Such a body of men, starving and in great distress, may become a serious menace this winter.

"For the local charities to deal adequately with this problem is an impossibility. To this organization it was peculiarly a problem for the Federal Government to deal with, as these men are reservists of a foreign country, in many cases prevented from going into the United States, and immigrants brought here largely through Canadian immigration advertising. Surely the Federal Government should make provision for these men, if necessary, in barracks or camps.

"Our local charitable organizations have a heavy task to face this winter, and cannot assume the task of looking after and German reservists. Would it be possible for the Board of Trade to take this question up and bring it to the attention of the Federal Government? I understand that the same question is facing other cities of the Dominion.

"The officers of the Charity Organization Society would be glad to meet with the Board of Trade, if you so desired, to discuss the situation."

RUSSIANS NEED RELIEF.

Not only, however, have the Austrian laborers been feeling the pinch of want, but many applications for relief have been received from members of the Russian colony, which includes two or three hundred families, and Rev. V. F. Sakovich, a Russian Orthodox priest, resident in this city, in speaking with Mr. Smith recently, propounded a scheme whereby a regiment of one thousand Russian reservists might be formed in Canada, with headquarters in Montreal, under the Canadian Militia Department. That the ranks of such a regiment could easily be filled was the conviction expressed by Rev. Mr. Sakovich, who said, however, that one serious difficulty would have to be overcome, namely, that most of the men willing to join the regiment would be liable to be called home to serve in the Russian army.

Speaking of the general conditions of distress, Mr. Smith said that the cases now coming to the notice of the Charity Organization Society were about as numerous as during the worst part of last winter, and that greater distress was expected and being prepared for.

"We are working at top speed," Mr. Smith said. "One thing we find is that the applicants for help seem to be of a much wider variety of nationalities than usual. There are many cases of Italians, Russians, and especially Austrians. We are trying to work out a scheme whereby a satisfactory solution of the difficulty of handling all the cases may be reached.

"A special appeal has been made by circular letters sent to four or five thousand people for subscriptions to an emergency aid fund which has been organized, and already we have had many generous responses, one cause of special satisfaction to us being that many persons have either sent us handsome lump sums or promised to make monthly donations of cash as long as the war lasts. But we know that this letter will not reach many persons who would be willing to help, and even small sums would be gladly accepted.

"We expect to have many unusual cases to deal with," Mr. Smith went on, "and we are going to take special measures to meet the demands upon us during the winter. Already we have made arrangements for an up-town office, which will be opened soon."

A meeting of the society's executive was held yesterday evening to discuss arrangements for relief work, but nothing of a definite nature has yet been arrived at.