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BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE OLYMPIC VILLAGE AT HELSINKI.

The biggest and most international "boarding house" in the world.

By WERNER WYMAN,

Chairman of the International Culinary Exhibition 1954, Berne.

The many thousands of flags in the city of the Olympiad have been put away and the last of the competitors and visitors have, no doubt, once again reached their scattered homes all over the world. We, who have also returned home must now try clearly to assess all we have seen and experienced.

One of the most impressive aspects of the organisation in Helsinki was, undoubtedly, the housing and feeding of over 5,000 athletes for three weeks at Käpylä, the western Olympic village. This "village" is a pretty housing estate about three miles from the stadium, consisting of about 200 houses of several stories grouped together in blocks and set amidst shining birches and colourful gardens. All these houses were built in such a way that immediately after the Olympiad they could be painted, papered and occupied by local families. National groups occupied whole blocks of houses or single buildings, according to their size. One of the most interesting things was to stroll through the streets of this cosmopolitan spot. The houses were decorated with the corresponding national flags and the name of the country was written over the doorway in large letters.

One met groups of men of all shades of colour and heard the languages of the whole world. All wore their picturesque training outfits or official uniforms. But the athletes of 14 nations living here had not only to be suitably housed; they also had to be fed to their complete satisfaction. One must bear in mind how important suitable and regular meals are for athletes; everything is eaten by the "gramme" and even by the stop-watch. According to famous doctors, the proper quantity of a meal selected to suit the individual, and eaten a certain time before the event can often be the decisive factor in enabling him to beat the others by fractions of a second.

The Finns have proved that they are not only first-class sportsmen but also outstanding organisers in the culinary sphere.

Questionnaires were sent out to all countries to find out their preferences in the way of food, and an enormous tent was put up as "Restaurant des Nations". The management of this, the biggest specialised restaurant in the world, lay not in the hands of a famous international catering expert but of a charming lady. In spite of her enormous burden of work, Mrs. Airi Koskimies, the wife of a university professor, devoted three whole hours of her working time to me. That was the most charming and interesting interview I had had so far.

As I lunched with her I asked her how she, a "Layman", had obtained this important post. Quite simply, for she had already shown her mettle as a Lotta and organiser in sports clubs. And it had been a matter of course for herself and her daughter, like many hundreds of other women, to offer their services voluntarily for this huge task which concerned the whole nation. Together we visited the many store rooms, tasted the consignment of 900lbs. of sliced,

cellophaned packed bread which arrived fresh from the U.S.A. every day. We saw the fine fruit and melons given daily by the Netherlands and the excellent rice brought by the competitors from the East. Dozens of crates of eggs lay in the store rooms in model order (daily consumption 7,500-8,000 eggs) together with containers and packages bearing names and addresses from all over the world.

The tent, which was over 200 yards long, was divided into seven restaurants. Various nations were grouped together according to food and even religion, in the Oriental, Central American, Central European, British-U.S.A. and Officials' restaurants. Every competitor and official could eat and drink all he wanted free of charge in "his" restaurant. For each lunch and dinner there was a set menu written in seven languages, apart from other items. The control system was very ingenious. For instance the guests from the Argentine, Brazil, Chile, Spain, Guatemala, Haiti, Cuba Mexico, Porto Rico, Uruguay, Venezuela and Panama had green badges entitling them to eat only in their restaurant, which was also painted green. Behind the buffets whole rows of charming blonde Finnish girls waited on their guests. The kitchen equipment was most rational and modern. Hospitals, barracks and factories lent steam coppers and electric stoves. Of the 420 persons concerned with bodily welfare only 6 were men — a Fin, a Norwegian, a German, a Brazilian, an Italian and a Swiss, who saw to it that the athletes of these countries were served, if necessary, with a really expertly prepared portion of

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risotto or "Bernese Rösti" (fried potatoes prepared in the Bernese style). Every customer of this "Restaurant Olympique" that I talked to was completely and utterly satisfied.

I was particularly struck by the calm, devotion and care with which these 420 women worked. Even in the biggest "heat of battle" of serving they were polite to one another, and Finland's women here gave an example of team-work at its very best.

German text translated by Walter Bachmann, M.H.C.I., M.C.F.A., F.I.C.D., B.C.A., Patron of The International Academy of "Chefs de Cuisine" and Association of Cooks in Great Britain and Chairman of the British Section of the International Culinary Exhibition 1954 in Berne (Switzerland.)

A CORRECTION.

In our report of the N.S.H. (Journée) Mr. Fries was inadvertently described as representing the "Unione Ticinese", it was in fact the "Union Helvética".

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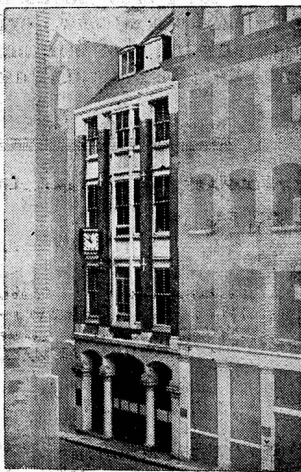
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