"UNRRA'S OPPORTUNITY"

"On December 14th, the Lords debated the question of relief in Europe and the work which UNRRA was commissioned to undertake. The noble speakers underlined the desperate need for relief which liberation has revealed. Lord Huntingdon, for instance, had telling facts to give on the state of food supplies in Western Europe. The Lords also expressed anxiety about the role which is being assigned to UNRRA. As Lord Huntingdon put it,

"the members of UNRRA are very worried over their powers and position... UNRRA delegates confess that it is impossible for them to cope with their gigantic tasks under their present powers.

"The debate undoubtedly gave voice to a widespread feeling of puzzled disquiet. Everywhere in Europe hunger and unemployment are producing unrest and violence which are the background and in part the cause of civil strife in France and Belgium and, worst of all, in Greece. Obviously the relief of this distress should be a first call on the Allies' initiative and resources. In creating UNRRA nearly two years ago, they recognized that the need would arise. Yet now that both UNRRA and the crisis it was designed to meet exist together, it appears to be extremely difficult to bring the one to bear upon the other. Into most reports and discussions on UNRRA has entered a note of frustration and disillusion. The externals—the appropriation of money, the building up of staff, the full-scale international conference at Montreal in September—all these are in order. Why then should the structure seem to ring so hollow not only to those who think of UNRRA as a piece of phoney internationalism but also to those who pin their hopes to it as the first executive agency of the United Nations?

"One reason is perhaps the inflated hopes it first aroused. Some people seem to have conceived of UNRRA as a supplying and distributing agency capable of superseding all the normal national channels of supply. Such a conception was and is in the highest degree unrealistic. There are hardly enough people to run the crumbling administrations of Europe as it is, without duplicating each with another organization introduced from outside. The definition of UNRRA's function once given by President Roosevelt — 'to help people to help themselves'—is undoubtedly right. Any other approach would at once be wrecked by the strong resurgent nationalism of the liberated states.

"In Western Europe, each Allied country, with the partial exception of Norway, is in a position to buy its own supplies and will distribute them independently. Their lists of requirements are in some cases already before the Anglo-American Combined Boards for Food, Raw Materials and Supply in Washington. Even so, UNRRA is playing a vital part as referee. A close liaison exists between UNRRA and the Combined Boards and all requests for food and raw materials are balanced against the likely supply. If the needs of the countries which cannot afford to buy supplies and must rely on UNRRA are prejudiced by their neighbour's requisitions, then UNRRA sees to it that the materials in short supply are rationed."
"In Eastern Europe—in Greece, Jugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Poland—the position is different, for it is unlikely that any of these states will be able to finance its own relief. Czechoslovakia and Poland have already put in tentative demands and an UNRRA mission for the Balkans under Sir William Matthews has already been set up to administer relief in Jugoslavia and Greece. The obstacles to UNRRA's work here are partly military, partly political. The chief reason why UNRRA cannot operate immediately in Eastern—or indeed in Western—Europe is the fact that for some months yet relief will probably continue to be administered by the Civil Affairs branch of the Army. UNRRA officials have, however, been working with Civil Affairs in Greece and in Western Europe. In Eastern Europe relief will be handed on to UNRRA as soon as possible. It is then that the political difficulties will arise. The first and most obvious is to secure in these war-shattered lands a government sufficiently broadly based for UNRRA to work through it without giving political offence. UNRRA cannot take over the entire work of distribution. This must be left up to the local administration under UNRRA supervision. Yet the tragedy of Greece—where the UNRRA mission has temporarily withdrawn—shows how much the work of international relief depends upon political pacification.

"The other political problem is the attitude of the Russians. They stand high in the Councils of UNRRA but, unlike the United States and Great Britain, they can only be receivers and not suppliers of relief. For relief in their own territory, they will almost certainly prefer to adopt the methods of Western Europe. Either through their own resources or through lend-lease or through long-term loans, they will secure supplies which do not require, as UNRRA's supplies require, any sort of international supervision. The case is clearly different in Poland and Czechoslovakia, which fall within the Russian military command. Russia cannot supply their wants. The obvious solution would be to use the agency of UNRRA which Russia in part controls. The difficulty of divided authority in Poland does not arise, since the Polish Government in London has with rare magnanimity waived the question of the distributing agency, provided only relief reaches the suffering Poles. But the Russian Government has not yet made up its mind on the role of UNRRA in its own military sphere. After the Montreal Conference it was hoped that the Director General of UNRRA, Governor Lehman, would go to Moscow and there assist the Russians to reach a decision. His mission is only postponed, but meanwhile UNRRA can hardly be blamed for 'working only on paper' in Eastern Europe.

"No one will deny that these are formidable obstacles. Yet they should not be allowed to overshadow the achievement of UNRRA or the openings which await it, if it pursues the right policy. It is no small thing that through the agency of UNRRA the interests of the poorer nations are being protected against the buying power of their richer neighbours. It is no small thing that over a billion dollars' worth of supplies have already been ordered and in part manufactured in the United States, Canada, Great Britain and Brazil.
UNRRA's Opportunity (continued)

It is no small thing that in any emergency or sudden crisis, UNRRA can step in and assist any nation and that trained specialist staffs are already available to answer any such call. In Western Europe, even if the major work of distribution rests with the Governments themselves, UNRRA has the responsibility for the vast problem of displaced persons, over 20 million of them. In Eastern Europe the opportunities are even greater. Whatever settlement is reached in Greece, it will not lessen the need for relief. Nor will it render an international agency any less suitable for the work of relief. In Yugoslavia the need will be as urgent. The work may be delayed in the Balkans, but sooner or later UNRRA's task will be very heavy.

"The openings are so great that it is impossible to blame all UNRRA's frustrations on the European situation alone. Some at least seems to lie with the direction of UNRRA's policy. Complaints about the limitation of UNRRA's sphere have been combined with a too cautious attitude towards the resources at UNRRA's disposal. It is true that UNRRA has not been given the field of work the idealists first hoped. It is also true that UNRRA's budget of $2 billion, voted by the constituent states, will not cover the needs of Europe. But it is not the best policy at the moment to complain on the one hand that the task is smaller than was expected and on the other that the resources are too limited to permit the acceptance of new commitments.

"For UNRRA, as for many other political agencies, the only path to success is by way of successful action. When UNRRA has one job to its credit superbly done, the other jobs will appear. The first possibilities are Displaced Persons in Europe and the Balkan Mission. If these are well done, they will influence Russia's attitude, they will create new openings in Europe, they will set the right patterns for Far Eastern relief. UNRRA will be able to add genuine industrial reconstruction to the patching and mending permitted them now; above all it will take the vital step from a paper constitution to a going concern.

"The British and American Governments undoubtedly want to make UNRRA a success. At the Montreal Conference, Mr. Dean Acheson and Mr. Richard Law left no doubt about their Governments' sincerity. The responsibility therefore falls squarely upon Governor Lehman and his colleagues. Perhaps the jobs are fewer and smaller than they hoped. Let them go forward and make a triumphant success of what jobs there are. Perhaps the money is inadequate. Let them spend it all, ask for more and test the Government's backing at its most sensitive point. Action and courage are the two things UNRRA needs today. If they are lacking, neither bigger jobs nor greater resources are likely to come its way."