The Honorable Herbert H. Lehman  
State Capitol  
Albany, New York  

My dear Governor:

There is an urgent problem which perhaps does not lie in your immediate jurisdiction, although the handling of it will vitally affect the success of your future work in the saving of life and reconstruction in Europe. In that view and from my deep interest in the question itself I feel it should be called to your early attention.

There is the most urgent need of food supplies during this winter to the women, children and the unemployed men in the occupied democracies—Belgium, Holland, Norway and Poland. And the supplies now being sent to Greece should be increased by more meats and fats for children.

The situation of these peoples in this their third winter of war is so desperate that no relief after the war is over will restore the vast amount of life lost or health destroyed. Hardly any further evidence of starvation is needed than that the combined ration of all meats and fats in Belgium is now down to about two pounds per month per person, and that much is not always obtainable. This compares with American consumption of about twenty pounds. Disease and death are already claiming millions of children, the aged and the weak.

I do not wish to trouble you with history but a little of it is necessary for clarification. In 1940, most of the governments and all of the local relief committees in these countries appealed to me to negotiate with the belligerent governments for the recognition of a neutral non-governmental body, similar to the Belgian Relief Commission, to undertake their relief. There were
ample funds available and Swedish ships could be obtained, and thus the Allies would not be deprived. The plan we proposed for protection to imports and native food and ships, together with neutral supervision, was accepted by the Germans, but refused by the British even upon an experimental basis.

When in the winter of 1941 the United States became so involved as to be no longer neutral, this plan involving Americans was not workable.

From April to June 1941 the Committee on Food for the Small Democracies which comprises more than 2000 leading Americans (of which I am Chairman) urged upon our Government that it should intervene to secure that the neutral governments in Europe, together with the International Red Cross, should undertake the negotiation and service. This was however refused and I enclose the correspondence of the time.

In August 1942 I was immensely pleased to see that this exact plan had been adopted to relieve starvation in Greece. The British and American Governments approved proposals of the Turkish, Swedish and Swiss, working with the International Red Cross. On the Allied side, the blockade was opened; and, on the German side, assurances were given of protection to ships, and that both imported and native food should be used by the Greek people only - the distribution to be under neutral supervision. Large shipments have been made and our State Department has expressed its confidence that supplies are being consumed by the Greeks only and have encouraged large American contributions in support of the Greek Committee.

It is obvious, therefore, that the exact plan we proposed has been accepted; that the previous attitude has been reversed and the reasons formerly given against it by the Allied Governments have been found to be untenable. Since that time also large and regular amounts of food have been shipped to British prisoners in Germany under the
supervision of the International Red Cross and the British Government has given frequent assurances that it completely reaches its destination. Surely these women and children are also German prisoners.

Aside from the sheer appeal of life, suffering and death which should compel every effort, we cannot avoid certain responsibilities in this matter. Most of these peoples in the other occupied democracies have depended upon overseas' imports for a substantial portion of their food and that is denied them by the Allied blockade. This deprivation has been immensely increased by German robbery. And one object of these arrangements is to bring these robberies to an end. The primary responsibility for all this of course rests upon the Germans for having overrun their countries. Yet some measure of responsibility attaches to us for the blockade if, as I am convinced, the protection to their domestic supplies and the imports can be safeguarded. Certainly it is worth making the effort and an experiment.

As all this has been demonstrated as workable in the case of Greece, there can be no justification for refusal of at least an experimental effort to save these other millions.

Should these people be called upon to endure starvation for the balance of this war, we shall have an evil scene upon which to rebuild in these countries after the war is over. A recent Belgian publication makes this statement:

"The whole question is whether the United Nations are fighting to liberate oppressed peoples or to liberate a vast cemetery."

I would be happy to discuss the matter with you at any time.

Yours faithfully,

[Signature]

Enclosures