February 20, 1943

OFR - Governor Lehman:

I am growing increasingly concerned about the trends in public discussion on foreign relief. These trends appear to be largely the result of our inability up to this point to nail down our sphere of operation and relationships with other agencies. There are, of course, many reasons for our inability to resolve these relationships but the fact remains that on March 4 a quarter of a year will have elapsed since Mr. Lehman took the oath, and thus far we have been unable to speak with any finality on what we propose to do and how we propose to do it.

I am chiefly concerned at the moment about the drive of Herbert Hoover to snatch the leadership in the relief problem in any manner possible. The following facts seem to be outstanding in the situation:

(1) The outstanding relief issue in the public mind at the moment is the pressure drive and debate being led by Hoover for extension of relief through the blockade.

(2) This drive is spreading rapidly outside the ranks of Hoover followers to the ranks of our friends or those who normally should be our friends. In this connection witness Senate and House Resolutions introduced by Democrats for extension of relief through the blockade, and the organization in New York on February 17 of a drive sponsored by 43 Protestant leaders to force immediate shipments of dried milk and vitamins for children, mothers and invalids through the blockade.

(3) Our friends and supporters are finding it difficult to answer this pressure campaign simply because they don't know our position on the matter, and the mere statement that military considerations must control the situation is not a satisfactory explanation.

(4) We should not permit ourselves to be forced into a position in which Herbert Hoover will break ground for a problem which we are capable of solving ourselves. We should not permit ourselves to be dragooned by Hoover or anyone else into taking any steps which we do not consider wise.

I understand, of course, the very delicate international problems.
problems involved in this issue. But I still think that in justice to Mr. Lehman's office the situation must be resolved with some such procedure as the following:

(1) A decision by Mr. Lehman as to whether we do or do not want to extend relief operations through the blockade.

(2) If we do want to undertake such operations, the issue should be placed once again at the highest possible levels -- President Roosevelt, Mr. Hull and Mr. Churchill.

(3) On basis of the decision at the top level, immediate steps should be taken to disseminate through all channels available either:

   a. Why this operation can not be undertaken.

   b. Some form of a statement that will describe the steps which we hope will lead to relief through the blockade.

Attached is the New York Times report of February 18 on the organization of the Protestant leaders who, while disclaiming any connection with the Hoover program, still urgently are pressing for action through the blockade.

Thomas F. Reynolds