

OUR SHARE IN "UNRRA"

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MONEY, as nations handle it now, has come to mean very little, but seventy millions is still a good-sized sum. That is what Canada has turned over to UNRRA to be used in picking up the pieces of Europe's battered jigsaw puzzle and putting them together again. We have also released many of our prominent citizens to give leadership in this organization with the cabalistic name, which has been called the greatest experiment in human solidarity in history. The flock of words added to our vocabulary by this war has been reduced to the most absurd set of hieroglyphics that ever made "printer's pi" of the daily papers. That may help to explain why some of us have not yet been able to make out, in the current rash of *alphabetitis*, just what is the newborn monster or state or secret society, referred to as UNRRA.

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This infant was born in 1943 when representatives of forty-four nations signed an agreement in Washington, creating the *United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration*. The best wishes at its christening were all for a short life. It was an emergency organization which grew out of a bold conception of the needs of a future such as no earlier generation ever had to face. It was planned on a scale to fit a gigantic undertaking which then seemed a long way off. It had no blueprints or charts to follow. No one could guess how big the emergency might turn out to be. All there was to go by was the memory of the horror and confusion which broke over Europe after 1918 and the certainty that that would be nothing to what lay ahead.

That was when people were saying: "Let's beat Hitler first, and then worry over post-war problems!" But the leaders of the United Nations got down to realities. Winston Churchill took the first step when he promised the dispossessed of Europe food, freedom and peace, after Germany was conquered. Out of several preliminary plans and committees, UNRRA finally emerged. It began at once to map out its campaign. It mustered its armies of peace and moved them into position around the fringes of the battlefronts, ready for the moment when they must move swiftly into action.

It was a tedious wait. A programme with so many sponsors was bound to come in for criticism. It savored too much of a goodwill organization. American isolationists saw the finger of

Roosevelt in it. Some of the countries, needing its help most, suspected its political and economic motives. They had had too much regimentation under Nazi rule, and wanted no more, not even the most beneficent. Not all the wrinkles have been ironed out. Efforts are still being made in certain quarters to undermine UNRRA from various motives. But the member governments have gone on proving their faith in it by promoting it with substantial contributions.

It is not a philanthropic institution. You cannot offer charity to sensitive people who have gone through agony in the front lines and have every right to be proud of their scars. It is not even an attempt on the part of the unravaged countries to make up in a small way for what the others have suffered. It is merely an international service agency to tide the world over a dangerous crisis. It is essentially humanitarian and noble. It is also a practical scheme, well-seasoned with self-interest, to ward off fresh calamity, which would affect the whole of our dwindling global neighborhood.

Europe has turned into a giant ant-hill, disturbed by the ruthless Axis boot, with the inhabitants swarming in all directions after food, shelter, families, or just, in sheer panic, swarming. Left alone, this would end in some sections coming out with nothing. Prices would soar, and general chaos would be let loose. It was UNRRA'S business to take measures of precaution for this scramble. It began tapping the supply lines of the world, setting them flowing where they were most needed. It was not quite in time. It is now acknowledged that the disaster in Greece might have been avoided if UNRRA had been given transportation for supplies into the country. There is no reasoning with starvation.

Each government (of uninvaded countries) behind UNRRA, pledged one per cent of its annual income for the year ending June thirtieth, 1943, to its support. Ten per cent of that was in currency, the rest in credits to be used in buying supplies within the country. Biggest givers to the two billion dollar budget were the United States (\$1,350,000,000) and the United Kingdom (\$322,400,000); Canada came third. Australia promised thirty-eight millions; Brazil, thirty; New Zealand, eight, and so on. Outside relief agencies, joining forces with UNRRA, brought in some big contributions. Canada was one of the first to pay her cash allocation in full.

For all its tremendous support, UNRRA cannot expect to remake the world, only to patch it up a little. It cannot

clothe and feed more than ten per cent of Europe's war victims. That other swarming ant-hill in the Far East must be grappled with seriously, later. The Administration's programme has been carefully planned to meet specific needs, but its policies must be adjustable to take care of unforeseen developments. It will go into the liberated countries (when invited) after the military authorities (SHAEP) leave, to give advice and help. Germany is another matter. What happens there is the concern of the allied armies, but UNRRA has been asked to go in and work on the displaced persons problem with SHAEP.

Scraps of conversation overheard in the elevators in the UNRRA Headquarters in Washington may be in any language. It aims to set a pattern for world cooperation, bringing people from the ends of the earth to work together, first checking all their baggage of race or religious bias or arrogant nationalism, outside the door. The Bureau of Areas has a Russian Chief, the Secretariat a Chinese. The Financial Adviser is Polish. Full responsibility for the Welfare Division rests on the shoulders of a very feminine, blonde Canadian, Mary Craig McGeachy. A Czechoslovakian and a Canadian, graduate of the University of British Columbia, worked together on the development of UNRRA's Training School. Henry M. Cassidy has now gone back to Toronto University to direct its School of Social Welfare, but he is given much credit for laying the foundations of this training programme.

An undertaking so vital to the world's future demands a highly skilled and intelligent personnel. The staff of UNRRA is "hand-picked". It includes Catholics, Protestants, Menonites and Jews. Many have done welfare work in organizations like the Red Cross, the Friend's Ambulance Unit, or the Girl Guides. Some have special ties with the country they wish to serve; a father born in Warsaw or an ancestor from Prague. Each is expected to have adaptability, plain common sense and an international mind, with a feeling of responsibility, not to his own government but to the administration as a whole.

Those who volunteer for overseas, pass their "physical", and meet all the requirements go to the Training School at the University of Maryland. The course in languages, historical background and customs of the countries where those in training were bound, used to last six weeks. They got further orientation in the London Office, or, if they were headed for the Balkan or Italian Missions, in Cairo or Rome. Now the need is so

urgent that the training programme has been cut to two weeks. It is given over to grounding in UNRRA's basic principles and the practical problems to be coped with, which may include anything, from a "delousing" project to digging a latrine. If any of the volunteers have been picturing themselves in a glamorous career abroad, the Training School, along with shots for yellow fever, tetanus, typhus and other interesting possibilities, soon shatters that dream. Once in the field, they live in special uniforms according to Spartan GI standards. They have already been under fire. Thirty were wounded in Greece (one, an American girl). One man was taken prisoner in France.

UNRRA is not out to impose new programmes on any community, but to put those already tried and proved by it back on their own feet. It expects to draft more local workers than it imports. It will not go in for big things. Someone else will have to rebuild railways and replace great bridges. It will not restore his power to the industrial magnate nor the landowner. Its job is with the little man. It means to see that he gets back to his home, collects the remnant of his scattered family and finds the materials to begin his everyday living.

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The first great task will be to get him home. The tragic army of nomads (from ten to twelve millions) roaming about as displaced persons, is now monopolizing the European picture. Their faces, stamped by famine and more horror than we can begin to fathom, are only too familiar to us in news pictures. Every liberated or captured city had its quota, reduced to shadows of themselves, but still driven by one desperate impulse to get back home. France, alone, had two millions for whose return she has been bravely trying to save and plan, besides her prisoners of war. Poland had three millions; the Soviets, two. Two million have no national status left, and are claimed by nobody.

Those who are able, and many who are not, get right on the roads and nothing can stop them. This huge mass migration, clogging highways, foraging and pillaging and dying by scores, could soon be a menace beyond all control. The Army has asked UNRRA for four-hundred-and-fifty teams of workers to help in collecting *les sinistres*, as they are called, and conveying them, in groups of a thousand, to Assembly Centres set up to care for them. These teams, of from ten to twelve persons, come under Displaced Persons, with representatives from the other Divisions.

Assembly Centres in Europe will not be called camps. Germany has given the word a too dreadful meaning. They may be set up in any public building or group of houses, with a central office, where from one to six thousand people will be identified, investigated, fed and sheltered until they can be sent home. Information of various kinds is given out, and employment found for those who have a long wait. The Welfare Division looks after the old, the children without parents, the pregnant women and all who are too handicapped to be independent. The sick and hospital arrangements are in charge of the Health Division, which also checks for disease and takes constant precautions against epidemics.

Those who insist on "hiking" will be met by "flying squads". These are sets of motor vehicles equipped with field feeding service, emergency first aid units, information and interviewing units and an ambulance for those who collapse on the way. Efforts are made to persuade the "trekkers" to go to the nearest centres, but not always with success.

UNRRA has had some experience with these centres. It began a year ago by taking over six of them from the British Middle East Relief and Refugee Administration in Egypt, Palestine and Syria. These were literally camps. The largest, at El Shatt, had as many as twenty-five thousand at a time, living under canvas on the desert, a hundred miles from Cairo. UNRRA determines the policy of these camps, but they are self-governing and to some extent self-sustaining. They held Yugoslavs, Albanians, Greeks and Italians, two-thirds women and children, and men who were wounded guerillas or too old to fight.

Suffering had not broken the spirit of these sturdy people. They raised gardens, cooked and served their own meals, made shoes and clothing when scraps of material were at hand. They taught each other trades so that they could be useful to their countries when they returned, and trained nurses to go out and take care of their wounded. They sent their children to school with no equipment but a few tattered books and the sand as a blackboard. The cycle of these centres is in some cases complete. The first shiploads have been repatriated. The picture of them landing on the dock, with the children who had forgotten their homeland and all their pitiful little possessions in their hands (mostly contrived from salvaged tin or wood in the camp), is both bright and sombre. None of them knew what they might find when they landed.

It will be a slow business getting the little man with all of his kin back to what is left of his home to begin again. He must begin again. Individually he is of no importance whatever, but the delicate balance of our whole world system depends on whether he gets the lumber and nails to rebuild his house, the tools to carry on his trade, food for his pantry and shoes for his children. UNRRA's Bureau of Supplies hopes to see that he does.

The little shops he needs must be re-opened; the baker's, the butcher's, the shoemaker's. Temporary quarters may have to be found for schools, equipment provided and the locality combed for teachers. UNRRA deals in homely but essential items which keep community wheels running; gear for fishermen, blacksmith's anvils, seeds and binder twine. Each country specifies its urgent needs. Belgium must have pit-props for its idle coal-mines. Czechoslovakia wants textiles to start its basic industries again. Luxembourg asks for lamps and kerosene; Dalmatia, needles and thread.

We realize now how dry Hitler squeezed the orange of the occupied countries. UNRRA has been ransacking the cupboards of the world for supplies, and trying to portion them out fairly. It is getting coffee from Colombia, blankets from Uruguay, raw wool from Australia, salt cod from Newfoundland. Replacing the live stock stolen and devoured by Germany is a major problem in which Canada will play a part.

We have also promised wheat, cod liver oil, lard, flour and many other commodities. UNRRA has also decided to spend part of the "free fund" for more Canadian wheat and meat. When food values are no longer reckoned in dollars and cents, this is considered a generous gesture. We are also turning over some of our army salvage stocks; a half million pairs of trousers, jackets and overcoats which will be adapted for civilians.

The arrival of the first supply ships in European ports, with all the bells on shore pealing, flags flying and the total population out to see the event, is one of the few bright pictures in to-day's grim album. The undernourished workers who undertook the unloading had to be fortified with sandwiches, but they were invariably caught saving part of them for their famished children.

We can be proud of Canada's share in the materials distributed by UNRRA and also of our part in handling them.

Over a hundred of our leading citizens have joined UNRRA's staff. Most of them are now in Europe. There are doctors, lawyers, nurses, technical experts, college professors, welfare workers and secretaries from every corner of the Dominion, who now hold some of the most responsible positions in the Administration. Each before being accepted had proved himself an expert in his own line, and his skill is now being applied to re-building hopeless ruins and solving insoluble problems. The emergency for which UNRRA was created has proved bigger and more ominous than we feared. Armies of peace, moving into action, cannot succeed without our moral as well as material backing. Here is our instrument. If it fails the future becomes something more than we want to contemplate.