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Belgium's need. [1914-1918]

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Commission for Relief in Belgium

1009 Mills Bldg., San Francisco, Cal.

BELGIUM'S NEED.

The following statement has been prepared by Tracy B. Kittredge, Field Secretary in California of the Commission for Relief in Belgium (C. R. B.). Before the outbreak of the war, Mr. Kittredge was traveling on the continent of Europe as a graduate student of history. On the organization of the Belgian Commission by Mr. Herbert Hoover, Mr. Kittredge volunteered his services, and was in Belgium from December, 1914, to August, 1915, as a delegate of the Commission in charge of the actual distribution of food and clothing in the province of Limbourg. Beside being founded on personal observations, his statements rest on documentary evidence, and are authentic.

I.—WHAT IS THE CONDITION OF BELGIUM TODAY?

Three million people in Belgium are wholly or partly destitute.

Paralyzed by war for eighteen months, ruled by a conquering army, they are fed by charity. To them, the American flag and the letters "C. R. B." (Commission for Relief in Belgium) mean bread and meat, and the possibility of continuing to exist.

II.—WHY IS THERE DANGER OF FAMINE IN BELGIUM?

The products of Belgium's soil will feed its people only one-third of the year, and ordinary imports are stopped.

With a population of seven millions, and a density of population of more than six hundred to the square mile, the people of Belgium in peace times imported seventy per cent of their food supplies. Left to herself Belgium would starve in a few months, as the war has closed all the ordinary channels of importing food.

III.—WHY HAVE NOT THE GERMANS FED BELGIUM?

For three reasons:

(1)—Belgium is an “occupied” country and not an “annexed” one, and by the provisions of international law and of The Hague Conventions, an occupying army is not obliged to feed the civil population of “occupied” areas.

(2)—Then, too, the Germans claim that the famine in Belgium is due not to the German occupation but to the English blockade, which prevents Belgium from importing as usual seventy per cent of her food, and which closes her ports to the ships of the world.

(3)—Lastly, the Germans have no surplus of food, and must let the Belgians starve rather than draw on their own scanty supplies to feed them.

IV.—HOW HAS FAMINE BEEN AVERT- ED?

By the activities of the C. R. B., Belgium has been saved. This neutral body, organized and administered by Americans with Herbert Hoover, a Californian, at its head, has provided the diplomatic medium by which supplies can reach Belgium. The English government refused to permit food to enter Belgium, so long as they could not be certain that it would go to the Belgians, and not either directly or indirectly to the Germans.

The German Government of Belgium consented to the organization of the C. R. B., and Americans were sent to every part of Belgium to so control the distribution of relief supplies as to make sure that none were diverted to the Germans.

The English Government agreed to take the word of the C. R. B. as to the distribution, and for fifteen months have permitted it to ship the necessary food to Belgium.

V.—IS THERE ANY OTHER WAY TO HELP THE BELGIANS?

No! The people living in the districts occupied by the German armies cannot possibly be helped save by the C. R. B.

Enclosed by double lines of trenches, shut off by fighting lines from contact with the world, these people are completely dependent on the Commission. The English Government will not permit any other agency to send supplies across the North Sea. The German Government will permit no other relief agency to work in Belgium and Northern France.

VI.—WHAT ARE THE ACTIVITIES OF THE C. R. B.?

They are threefold:

(1) Food is supplied to the whole population of nine millions.

(2) Both food and clothing are given gratuitously to about three million destitute.

(3) Infants, young mothers, the sick, school children, the war-mutilated, etc., are cared for by special relief agencies from funds provided by the C. R. B.

VII.—HOW DOES THE C. R. B. DO ITS WORK?

Food is bought and gifts collected in all parts of the world, to supply the needs of Belgium.

From nearly every port of the world ocean steamers especially chartered for the purpose, carry the supplies to Rotterdam in Holland. Here the supplies are trans-shipped and sent into Belgium in canal-barges.

There is a complete national organization of the Belgians, which is responsible for the actual distribution of all food and clothing. There are committees in 3000 communes, working under the direction of ten provincial committees, and these in turn, are directed by the central national committee.

American delegates work in conjunction with the provincial committees in every province and chief city of Belgium to supervise the distribution.

VIII.—WHAT QUANTITY OF SUPPLIES HAS BEEN SHIPPED?

900,000 tons of food were shipped to Belgium from December 1, 1914, to November 30, 1915.

210 ocean steamers were required.

\$80,000,000.00 was spent in paying for these supplies and in transporting them to Belgium.

About 100,000 tons a month must now be shipped to provide a minimum ration for the 7,000,000 people of Belgium, and the 2,000,000 of Northern France, who are dependent on the C. R. B. for their supplies.

IX.—HAVE THE GERMANS TAKEN ANY OF THE SUPPLIES?

Most Emphatically No! says the Commission, and also the English Government, which is watching with jealous eye everything that happens in Belgium, and which constantly checks over the accounts of the C. R. B.

The system of accounting is so thorough that every ounce of food can be traced to its ultimate consumer in Belgium. The English are satisfied that all food sent in has reached the Belgians alone.

In the fifteen months of the work of the C. R. B. not a single unremedied case has occurred in which the Germans have violated their promises and taken any of the food.

X.—WHAT PROMISES HAVE THE GERMANS GIVEN TO THE C. R. B.?

(1) To permit the food of the C. R. B. to enter Belgium and to be distributed among the civil population without interference or seizure by the military authorities.

(2) To leave to the Belgian population all the food produced by Belgian soil, and actually needed for the provisionment of the Belgians.

(3) To turn over the whole of the 1915 harvest of breadstuffs in Belgium to

the C. R. B., to be distributed to the Belgian civil population.

(4) To pay cash for everything taken in Belgium, and for the wages of all Belgians employed by them, after January 15, 1915.

(5) To give the American delegates complete freedom of movement in Belgium, and to facilitate the work of food distribution in every possible way.

These promises have been consistently and faithfully adhered to since the beginning of the work of the C. R. B.

XI.—WHAT DOES EACH BELGIAN RECEIVE?

The maximum ration amounts to nine ounces of flour or eleven ounces of bread, and a similar quantity of other foods, such as beans, peas, rice, bacon, oatmeal, or maize, per day.

The destitute are given in addition a pint of soup each every day. In special cases, as for the sick, special meals are provided.

The cost of the minimum ration of bread and soup is only 7 cents a day per person. This low cost is due to the local contributions of material for the soup, which reduce the cost to the Commission. \$1.50 will clothe a baby; \$3.00 will clothe a child or an adult.

XII.—HOW MUCH HAS BEEN GIVEN TO BELGIUM THROUGH THE C. R. B.?

Approximately \$20,000,000.00, chiefly in goods, has been contributed by the outside world to Belgium. The U. S. has given \$7,000,000.00 of this. Most of the remainder has come from England and from the British Colonies.

XIII.—HOW DOES THE C. R. B. FINANCE ITS WORK?

Two-thirds of the Belgians pay more than the cost price for every ounce of food they receive. Six to eight million dollars is paid to the C. R. B. in Belgium every month, and one million of this, the profits on sales, is applied directly to the cost of maintaining the Benevolent Department.

The money collected in Belgium cannot be exported and with great difficulty the C. R. B., with the assistance of the Belgian, French, and English Governments, is able to find exchange for approximately \$6,000,000.00 monthly.

The total expenditures of the C. R. B. for food and transportation are about \$8,000,000.00 monthly. The difference between this sum, and that realized on exchange is made up from gifts from the outside world, from loans advanced by Belgian institutions, and from the working capital advanced by Belgians to the Commission.

XIV.—WHAT ARE THE EXPENSES OF THE BENEVOLENT DEPARTMENT?

For the month of October, 1915, the expenses were:

Appropriations to Communal Committees	\$3,527,000.00
To Unemployment Benefit fund	312,765.00
To special relief agencies...	483,390.00
The sources of these funds were:	
Profits from sale of food.....	\$1,050,201.00
Belgian contributions	2,816,974.00
General gifts from the outside world	456,000.00
Total	\$4,323,175.00

In addition to these sums, the various communes raise and expend their own borders for local relief, approximately two millions each month.

The total cost of the Benevolent Department is, therefore, about six millions monthly. Of this sum, only half a million a month now comes from the outside. Belgium is straining every nerve to keep herself alive. But she is living on her capital and month by month her resources and borrowing power diminish.

XV.—HAVE THESE FUNDS BEEN EFFICIENTLY ADMINISTERED?

The overhead costs of the work of the C. R. B. are approximately seven-tenths of one per cent of the sums expended, thus seventy cents in every hundred dollars are spent in administration and office expenses.

Lord Curzon in a recent speech in London said: "This Commission is an absolute miracle of scientific organization. Every pound of food and supplies is accounted for. The bulk of the work is voluntary, is work given gratuitously by those who take part in it; that again distinguish it from almost any previous attempt of the kind.

"Hitherto in political history you almost always find public relief, on a large scale, at any rate, associated with extravagance and scandal. But in this case, and I think in this case almost alone, it has been synonymous with economy and efficiency combined."

XVI.—HAS THE NEED OF BELGIUM BEEN MET?

Far from it! The destitute have never had more than a minimum ration, barely enough to keep them alive. This winter they need many more clothes than they did last winter, as the stock in Belgium is exhausted. While the needs are thus increasing from month to month, the resources of Belgium, which have so far been drawn on, are shrinking.

"Under circumstances such as these," says the C. R. B. in a recent report, "It is criminal to talk of the need of Belgium either as regards food or clothing having been met."

XVII.—WHAT WOULD HAPPEN WERE THE C. R. B. TO CEASE ITS WORK?

Starvation for Belgium; death for young children, and for the old and weak; a permanent lowering of vitality for those who survived; there would be bread-riots, followed by slaughter and destruction of property.

There is now in the warehouses of Belgium a supply of food sufficient for little more than a month. If the imports were to cease famine would set in within two months.

XVIII.—WHAT HAS AMERICA ACTUALLY GIVEN TO BELGIUM?

\$7,000,000.00 or seven cents per capita.

America has given only one-fifteenth of all the money expended by the Commission.

In 1906, the United States gave to San Francisco, to care for the 300,000 temporarily distressed the sum of \$8,000,000.00. It has given less than this sum for Belgium, where three million are now destitute, and where the number of destitute has been increasing for a year and a half, and must continue to increase so long as the war lasts, and more and more of the Belgians spend their last penny of savings.

New Zealand, even though paying her part of the war-cost, has contributed \$1.25 per capita to Belgian relief. Canada and Australia have each given more, proportionately, than the U. S. A.

XIX.—WHY SHOULD AMERICA AID THE BELGIAN RELIEF WORK?

Because America should be foremost in international as well as national humanity. Because America's sympathy for Belgium should not be expressed in words alone. Because we are more able than any other nation to extend the help needed.

The Belgian Relief work has greatly influenced all thinking people of Europe in our favor. It is the one activity of the American people since the outbreak of war that is universally approved. It will have a permanent value as an advertisement of the best sort, in winning us the respect and friendship of Europe.

XX.—WHAT SPECIAL INTEREST HAVE CALIFORNIANS IN THE BELGIAN RELIEF WORK?

The chairman of the Commission is Herbert Hoover, a Californian, and a graduate and trustee of Stanford University. About one-fourth of the personnel of the C. R. B. has been from California. Prof. Vernon Kellogg of Stanford was at the head of the work. Prof. Angell of Stanford, and Dean Barrows of California are now in Belgium in the work of the Committee.