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# Creating a "piratical state organization for benevolence," the Commission for Relief in Belgium: 1914-1915

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**Creating a “piratical state organization for benevolence,”  
the Commission for Relief in Belgium: 1914-1915**

by

**Ryan Thomas Austin**

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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Ames, Iowa

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## ABSTRACT

On October 22, 1914 a temporary institution named the Commission for Relief in Belgium (CRB) was created by a group of diplomats, industrialists, businessmen, and volunteers under the direction of American engineer-financier Herbert C. Hoover with the goal of providing emergency food relief in Belgium. Within twelve months the scope of the CRB expanded from providing relief to the communes surrounding Brussels to an effort geared towards making Belgium self-sufficient by the harvest of 1915 before becoming the permanent, on-going, official charitable organization supporting Belgium. In the course of development the Commission evolved into a worldwide charitable organization network with diplomatic and political powers reserved primarily for sovereign states. Described as “A Piratical State Organization for Benevolence” the CRB combined seemingly disparate elements of private charity and philanthropy with principles of American big business and engineering into an organization with a single purpose of Belgian relief.

In 1914 and 1915 the CRB set up an infrastructure of relief under the Provisioning and Benevolence Departments that systematically accumulated, coordinated, and distributed charity in the form of money and material from around the world through volunteer organizations, cooperation with large freight companies and food producers in the United States, and shipping interests in Europe to deliver products to the Belgian communes. Working in conjunction with the Comité National the Commission scientifically determined the actual needs of the civil population and set up a network of warehouses, soup kitchens and canteens to deliver pre-specified rations on a daily basis. Active at every step of the provisioning process the delegates, representatives, and volunteers of the CRB stood constantly vigil to make sure that its promises were maintained Whether it was coordinating the collection of wheat and cornmeal in America,

writing appeals and pamphlets explaining the plight of Belgium, manning the Commission's warehouses and private fleet of shipping vessels, or serving as delegates inside the communes the thousands of volunteers that made up the CRB fought with resolve and tenacity to make sure that Belgium survived World War I.

This project focuses on the formative period of the CRB during its first year and a half of operations spanning from October 1914 to December 1915 in Belgium and Northern France. Over its first fifteen months of existence the Commission set into action its program of theoretical imports, established the basic parameters for diplomacy with belligerents, launched a vigorous press world-wide press campaign, and forged the system of charity that coordinated vast sums of money and supplies at an overhead expense rate of less than one-half of one percent—a figure unprecedented in the realm of charitable and philanthropic organizations. Tracing the experience of the CRB from multiple points of view the text examines the history of the Commission from the farms of North America to the dangerous waters of the English Channel, the negotiating table in London and Berlin, the occupied city of Brussels, the several thousand communes distributing rations and all places in between.

Under the constant threat of starvation, governmental prohibition, public scrutiny, harassment by the German military and financial failure the Commission pressed to feed Belgium in the most efficient manner possible under the guidance Hoover and his cadre of volunteers. While the CRB faced new challenges calling for it to adapt to conditions in Belgium and Northern France between 1916 and its retirement in 1919 the Commission's program of relief was fundamentally in place by the end of December 1915. For the remainder of its existence the structure and strategies employed by the CRB remained virtually static.

## INTRODUCTION

In August 1914 the major powers of Europe found themselves in a war that many believed would be quick and decisive. Under ultimatum the neutral country of Belgium was compelled to yield to advancing German forces on the march towards France. Despite a gallant effort native fortification supported by British reserves failed to stall the invasion and within weeks the nation was under the control of Germany. Suddenly a country of peasant farmers and laborers dependent upon imports for 80 percent of its necessities was cut off from the rest of the world. Fears of famine and starvation created a domino effect of concern that trickled down from the American Ministry in Brussels to the British Foreign Office where it was eventually brought to the attention of American engineer and financier Herbert Hoover.

Relief operations aimed at assisting beleaguered Belgians began with the purchase of a small cache of foods in London under the commission of the American Minister Brand Whitlock for the feeding of Brussels and the surrounding communes exclusively. All the while reports from across Belgium foretold of imminent tragedy if greater action was not taken. It was not long before newspaper readers in both Britain and the United States learned that food supplies were nearly exhausted throughout Belgium. Recognizing the seriousness of the situation in less than six weeks a series of contacts between diplomats, engineers, and businessmen in London and Brussels led to the creation of the Commission for Relief in Belgium on October 20, 1914. Under the chairmanship of Herbert Hoover the commission was immediately authorized to purchase relief goods for Brussels under the belief that the organization was a short-term association aimed at providing localized relief that would stave off starvation until the next harvest.

Once the CRB began operations in November 1914 it became apparent that its work would be more than temporary and limited in scope. Over the next fifteen months the commission in cooperation with the Comité National and Comité Français expanded into a virtual government with rights and liberties usually reserved for sovereign nations to provide ravitaillement to an estimated 8,000,000 people in Belgium and Northern France. Through the work of delegates, representatives, and volunteers the commission hammered out guarantees protecting imports and domestic crops from the belligerent powers while working tirelessly to raise funds across the globe for a distribution system that stretched from the Great Plains in North America and the Pampas in Argentina across the Atlantic to the front lines of the war and the Belgian communes. By late summer 1915 any thoughts entertained by the commission of retiring were cast aside. As the first calendar year of relief concluded in October of that year the CRB had installed a system of coordination and distribution for relief that set a precedent for both the remainder of conflict and for post-war ravitaillement efforts under agencies including the American Relief Association.

While the commission struggled with new problems pertaining to the operation of a state within a state on a day-to-day and month-to-month basis, by January 1916 the CRB had established what was described as a “piratical state organization for benevolence” that was well-equipped to deal with the demands of feeding a population that was weeks away from starving through a private relief organization that always existed mere days away from financial failure. Constant pressure from the Britain and Germany combined with the logistical difficulties of feeding an increasingly-destitute population to harden the commission’s resolve and dedication to the cause. Under the direct management of Herbert Hoover a cadre of American delegates and representatives met both the challenge of creating and implementing a program aimed at



wholly feeding a neutral nation under a state of war. This project details the developmental phase of relief efforts in Belgium during the first half of direct American involvement (October 1914 to December 1915) and the experiences of the CRB within this unique milieu.

### **The Historiography of the CRB and Herbert Hoover**

Several different features of the research and the writing in this project mark its exceptionalism. The narrative component of the text was derived in part from the enormous volume of CRB documents generated between 1914 and 1919 through office memorandum, financial accounting statements, official diplomatic communications, personal letters, and personal memoirs written by delegates and volunteers who participated in the process of relief. As a private charitable organization funded by massive multi-national fund raising campaigns and national governments (the British, Belgian, and French initially with the US contributing after its entrance in the war in 1917) the commission under the directorship of Hoover made it a point that the processes, conduct, business affairs, and financial standing of the CRB were a matter of public record. As demonstrated in the *Public Relations of the Commission for the Relief of Belgium, Volumes I and II*, the CRB kept strict and accurate record of its activities through internal memos, telegrams, financial statistics, relief statistics, and other forms of documentation. Records in the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library Archives in West Branch, Iowa detailing the weekly meetings of the CRB New York office confirm the importance of data to the members of the commission by including a weekly ledger of spending and expenses.

While these sources yield copious amounts of data relating to the day-to-day affairs of the CRB what they do not possess is a common interwoven narrative. Although the *Public Relations of the Commission for the Relief of Belgium, Volumes I and II* allows researchers to trace for example the lines of communication between the German general-government and Chairman

Hoover regarding specific events and circumstances within Belgium what these documents lack in general is a narrative that provides linkages between internal memos, statistics, and telegrams with the greater story of the Commission for Relief in Belgium over a four year period. With the exception of *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium: 1914-1917* written by T.B. Kittredge in 1917 there is not a narrative in existence dealing exclusively with the commission's work between October 1914 and December 1916. While Kittredge's work is of value as a primary source it is at the same time subject to external criticisms of objectivity—Kittredge himself was a CRB delegate and by his relation to the work can be questioned about his impartiality on the subject, not to mention the fact that the text lacked the access to many of the commission's documents published twelve years later in *Public Relations of the Commission for the Relief of Belgium, Volumes I and II*. *The History of the CRB* remains an important source of information regarding the work of the commission, but in essence Kittredge's text is the history of the CRB between 1914 and 1917 from his perspective. In general the task of creating a narrative covering the work of the CRB between October 1914 and January 1916 was comparable to putting together a puzzle containing literally thousands of pieces without an initial picture to use as a guide in arranging the pieces together.

The other unique and challenging part of this project has been the effort to combine a wide variety of personal accounts written by participants in Belgium during the war into a narrative component that blends the experience of ravitaillement with the documentary evidence of the relief program that validates the accuracy of individual's experiences. Several participants including Edward Eyre Hunt, George Barr Baker, Robert Withington, Vernon Kellogg, T.B. Kittredge, and Brand Whitlock in particular provided tremendous insight through personal journals that described the CRB in action. These individuals are of critical importance because

they create the vital link between the executive paper trail of the commission and its actual performance inside the Belgian communes. The writings of Whitlock in particular were of tremendous value thanks to his prominent role at the center of relief as the American Minister in Brussels. Originally assigned to Belgium before the war began, Whitlock was one of the first Americans involved in food relief and was one of the last Americans to depart after the United States entered the war in April 1917. His position was unlike any other in that he dealt with the Belgians, the Germans, the British, the Americans, Hoover, the Comité National, the Comité Français, and everyone else down to the local communes.

In creating the narrative of the CRB an emphasis was placed on the first hand accounts that were written at the time or just after the work of the CRB concluded in Belgium. Most of these personal narratives were originally published in the late 1910s or early 1920s immediately after the war. Secondary sources were used only for ancillary pieces of evidence and were for the most part not a major component of the greater narrative. For that reason the memoirs of Herbert Hoover published decades later played only a minor role in the research. Documents in the form of telegrams and internal memorandum were a far more accurate source of Hoover's perspective in his own words during the war. The latter chapters in the text detailing the experience of providing relief in Belgium utilizes the personal experiences of CRB members to trace the actions of the commission and the impressions of the participants at the time as they fit into the broader story of Belgian relief.

A third source of critical material in this project was newspaper articles, advertisements, and circulars published in America and Britain during the war. These pieces of evidence were important not only for their reports covering events in Belgium, but were also valuable because they possess opinions and perceptions regarding the conduct and results of relief from Allied and

neutral viewpoints. As a charitable organization the CRB under Chairman Hoover placed a high value on public relations and the garnering of public support. For this reason, newspaper articles and advertisements are the actual embodiments of commission's press campaign in action. Additionally, the newspaper articles provide a third layer of analysis regarding the progress of relief from the perspective of the journalist. While these articles were not always objective they represent opinions and views that are separate from those of the commission and the delegates themselves. For that reason they do provide a sense of objectivity because they reveal an outsider's perspective on the work of the CRB at the time of relief efforts were being conducted. Disbursed throughout the text the accounts of the commission published in British newspapers and the *New York Times* are an extremely important part of the greater narrative. The press clippings of the CRB collection at the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library Archives were used extensively in gathering this information. Assembled in one collection this history of the commission in the British press was tremendously insightful. Indeed an entire book could be written from this archive alone. The challenge regarding this data was deciding what materials were essential to the narrative given the constraints regarding length in this project.

Beyond the story of the Commission for Relief in Belgium detailed in the following chapters the rise of Herbert Hoover into both the American and European consciousness is a secondary, yet important feature of the research. While an enormous body of scholarship presently exists on his Presidential administration there are gaps in the treatment of Hoover's early years of public service that included the coordination and management of Belgian relief during World War I. In 1914, Hoover entered public service with a firmly established belief in the principles of individualism, voluntarism, and cooperation. It was through the Commission for Relief in Belgium, the American Relief Administration, and the US Food Administration that

these concepts were put into action and proven effective. Beyond elevating his personal status as the man who saved the lives of 20 million, the experience of feeding Europe solidified the principles that Hoover would apply to his work as the Secretary of Commerce and later the Presidency. More than a foray into politics and the public spotlight, Hoover's work during World War I established standards by which he would later govern the nation as an engineer-financier-manager.

Beyond Hoover's personal memoirs, George Nash and David Burner are among the few who have dealt with what historians consider Hoover's "missing years," those detailing his pre-1920s professional career and WWI relief work. In *Herbert Hoover: A Public Life*, Burner addresses Hoover through the ways in which his life and thought bore influence upon twentieth-century orderings of civilization, and the newer collectivities within business, the economy, and public opinion that now supplement or replace the older groupings by neighborhood, shop or local government. Combined with the scholarship of Joan Hoff-Wilson, the two portray Hoover as progressive reformer adapting to new situations. As an aggregate this scholarship has done much to inform historians about the pre-presidential Herbert Hoover. This project is also in part aimed at revealing additional aspects of Hoover's pre-Presidential career through his chairmanship of the CRB.<sup>1</sup>

What Nash and Burner have in common is their descriptions of Hoover's mining and business career before 1914. In what is considered the definitive biography on the subject entitled *The Life of Hoover, Volumes I and II* Nash sheds light on his successful engineering career in addition to giving an in-depth analysis of World War I relief work. Written as more than an interpretive narrative of Hoover's life, the impressive primary source material collected by Nash translates into a detailed explanation of his administrative and organizational acumen

<sup>1</sup> Burner, David. *Herbert Hoover: A Public Life*. (New York: Alfred Knopf Publishing, 1979), p. xi.

both before and during the war. While Burner dedicates two chapters to European relief efforts (combining the Commission for Relief in Belgium and the American Relief Administration) and Nash dedicates volume two and part of volume three of his collection to the subject of WWI relief coordinated by Hoover there is still considerable room for scholarship within the discipline dedicated exclusively to the programs, participants, and benefactors of Hoover-administered *ravitaillement in Belgium* during World War I. The story of World War I relief through predominantly American efforts remains an area of Hoover's history that is largely untouched in current scholarship, especially from an international perspective.

Originally this project began as an article giving a brief description of European relief and the accomplishments of the CRB and the ARA under the executive leadership of Hoover. In the process of expanding the narrative and refocusing the subject matter to emphasize the CRB between October 1914 and the beginning of January 1916 the research for this piece expanded to include not just the chairman but the history of the commission as a unified whole. Reflecting the extensive research discovered on the day-to-day management of the CRB the first half of the text features both the organizational structure of the commission and an analysis of Hoover's leadership as both the executive director of Belgian relief and tough negotiator secured guarantees with belligerent governments while securing sovereign powers the initiative. While the second half of the text shifts the focus in part away from Hoover directly to the work of the commission inside of Belgium it does not diminish the importance of Hoover's role in directing the program of relief that fed 8 million people in Northern France and Belgium. Hoover's chairmanship of the CRB marked not only his official entrance into the "political arena," but it was also the first demonstration of Hoover's financial, organizational, and leadership skills to people outside the mining and engineering industries. In America many would first be

introduced to these talents in 1917 when Hoover became the Director of the US Food Administration and later in his role as Secretary of Commerce and President of the United States.

### **General Features of the Text**

The treatment of the Commission for Relief in Belgium in the text employs an approach that is chronological in its coverage of 1914 and both contextual and chronological in its coverage of 1915. After providing a brief history of philanthropy in chapter one details the first days of German invasion and introduces the food emergencies that immediately followed Belgian occupation in chapter two. Utilizing both first-hand and newspaper accounts of events this section traces the first attempts made to assist Belgians up to the creation of the CRB in October 1914. In the following two chapters (three and four) the narrative details the genesis of the commission under the leadership of Hoover and overviews its first actions in the final two months of the year primarily through the use of personal accounts, newspaper articles, and internal documents of the CRB.

Chapters five through seven in essence details organizational structure of the CRB and how it functioned. Using largely the internal documents of the commission, this section of the text was the most challenging part of putting the puzzle together. By today's standards it would be like writing a business history of a corporation from a collection of e-mail messages written between members of the board and a collection of middle managers in the field. In these chapters the functions, processes, and the system of the commission are discussed at length. Covering the functional departments of provisioning and benevolence and including issues of funding, shipping, and belligerent negotiations this part of the narrative details the entire process of relief from the donation of money to the purchasing of wheat in Kansas or corn in Iowa to its shipment of these supplies to the East Coast for its journey across the Atlantic into Rotterdam

and Brussels on down to the communes governed by assurances brokered by the CRB between belligerents. Within this section specific attention is paid to the coordination of both money and food into Belgium.

The following two chapters (eight and nine) discuss the unique challenges the commission faced as a neutral power with quasi-governmental powers. Caught between the belligerents the CRB engaged in an on-going struggle to expand relief efforts and make the system of ravitaillement more efficient while trying to keep relief efforts alive. As direct participants in this process the contributions of both Brand Whitlock and Herbert Hoover are emphasized specifically. Whitlock's work with both the CRB and the Comité National by contrast to Hoover's as executive director of relief is significant because of the Minister's unique position as both a diplomat and participant in the actual distribution of relief. The contributions he made to ravitaillement efforts in Belgium are symbolic of the hard work and determination of a multitude of delegates that saved millions from starvation.

The final three chapters of the text (ten, eleven, and twelve) of the text transition from a definition of the CRB program into a detailed description of ravitaillement in action. Picking up the story of relief in late 1914 from chapter four and combining with the explanation of the system given in chapters five through seven, the three section of the narrative details the experience of the commission at the communal level in 1915. In these chapters the contributions of the Comité National and Comité Français are discussed as the final components of the interlocking system of relief that coordinated the distribution of rations within the communes. Additionally, this portion of the narrative also focuses on the experience of the American delegates and volunteers working within this system by detailing their interactions with both local authorities and the German general-government. As a post-script the concluding chapter of



the project includes the final statistics of the CRB program between 1914 and 1919 and discusses the immediate impact of the commission's benevolence in the 1910s and 1920s.

The overall focus of this project is on what by today's standards is considered the planning and implementation phases of relief work in Belgium that took place in 1914 and 1915. By the end of December 1915 the commission's strategies of benevolence and provisioning alongside its theoretical program of rations were in place. Structurally the commission by this point had its fundamental organization in place that would be followed by American delegates and volunteers until their withdrawal in April of 1917. Afterward, the Dutch and Spanish ministers that assumed control of the CRB employed the same strategies and structures that were previously implemented by American representatives.

Under this system created during the first fifteen months of operation the executive framework governing the commission in its relationship with the German general-government and other nation-states was in place, the Comité National and Comité Français were collaboratively distributing goods across Belgium and Northern France, and the provisioning and benevolence departments of the CRB were mobilizing charity outside Belgium while delegates within the Belgian provinces had clearly delineated responsibilities and duties guiding their actions. Outside of the occupied territories the CRB was supported by hundreds of local committees across the globe working with the CRB press agency that bolstered its program through print media outlets and advertisements coordinated out of the New York and London offices. Diplomatically, its close relations with both the British Foreign office and officials in Berlin allowed the commission to negotiate guarantees for shipping and distribution amiable to belligerent demands of war that permitted the commission's fleet of neutral vessels under its own markings to traverse the English Channel. As 1916 began the power and prestige earned by the

CRB granted it the dual role of guarantor and negotiator for import and domestic foodstuffs that would continue until its termination in the summer of 1919. While the CRB faced new challenges calling for it to adapt to conditions in Belgium and Northern France between 1916 and 1919, the structure that the commission followed was fundamentally in place by December 1915.

## CHAPTER ONE: *A Brief History of Philanthropy*

In broad terms philanthropy refers to private giving for public purposes. Beyond this definition the concept of philanthropy has been interpreted in numerous ways. Over the past three centuries the words philanthropy, charity, benevolence, and giving have commonly expressed the human character of engaging in good or worthy actions and deeds. In the seventeenth century, philanthropy meant a benevolent disposition and humane mind. During the following two centuries the term became associated with active participation in humanitarian reforms aimed at improving society. In the eighteenth century, the ideological foundation of modern charity was formed behind the emergence of a new view of man and society that fostered a scientific spirit of inquiry and investigation into various questions regarding the plight of man.<sup>2</sup>

Individual motivations also played a key role in the developing nature of philanthropy and giving. In the nineteenth century many people gave not only to help others but also did so as a response to their own need for forgiveness, reward, love, and recognition. At the time, philanthropy in America was most commonly associated with the “love of (fellow) man” expressed in an altruistic and humanitarian manner. Beyond its borders Americans philanthropy abroad was in part attributable to the great debt that American society and culture felt it owed to the Old World. In practice what Americans did through non-governmental efforts to help these people was closely related to efforts made at home to assist the disadvantaged members of society. As the concept of philanthropy came to include contributions of money to a variety of

<sup>2</sup> Curti, Merle. *American Philanthropy Abroad*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1963), p. viii. Kiger, Joseph C. *Philanthropic Foundations in the Twentieth Century*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), p. 7. Bremner, Robert H. *Giving: Charity and Philanthropy in History*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994), p. xii. Watson, Frank D. *The Charity Organization Movement in the United States: A Study in American Philanthropy*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), p. 13.

causes intended to benefit all classes the accepted nomenclature of giving was naturally extended to philanthropy both domestically and internationally.<sup>3</sup>

Personal motivations underlying people's desires to support philanthropic ventures have varied. At the root of some individual's decision to contribute was a sense of obligation to help the needy while others felt a sense of personal responsibility for related ethnic groups in other parts of the world. Religion was also a major factor in the support offered to various agencies operating domestically and abroad. In the twentieth century new motivational factors became involved in the drive to support philanthropy stemming from a sense of guilt based on the relative abundance found at home in contrast to the misery and suffering in other areas.<sup>4</sup>

Overseas philanthropy from the time of the American Revolution through the late nineteenth century was extended in a broadly generalized manner without a series of overriding principles or an organizational strategy. During this period philanthropic giving for virtually every foreign disaster was met in a characteristically American *ad hoc* manner with little formal or institutional connection between what was done on different occasions. Following the Spanish-American War in 1898 the nature of overseas philanthropy changed in terms of the magnitude of giving and by the larger role the government played in its provision. Changes in motivations and desires behind philanthropic giving were altered as well. Some people gave out of habit or in response to social pressures. In some instances the motives behind giving were related to class and occupational considerations. National pride also contributed to the sense of American giving abroad. Once the government began playing a larger role in philanthropy

<sup>3</sup> Bremner, *Giving: Charity and Philanthropy in History*, p. 107. Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. viii. Loc cit, 5. Loc cit, ix. By the end of the nineteenth century the structure and functions of voluntary agencies engaged in foreign relief and rehabilitation closely resembled those of their domestic American counterparts. Bremner, *Giving: Charity and Philanthropy in History*, p. xii.

<sup>4</sup> Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. x.

individuals began experiencing a different sense of feelings regarding giving to others especially in regards to the potential feelings of guilt related to national interests or foreign policy.<sup>5</sup>

American philanthropy abroad began with the extension of assistance to Canada in 1816 after a fire destroyed a large section of St. John's, Newfoundland. Despite a series of ongoing disputes between New Englanders and Britons for fishing rights off the coast of Newfoundland a group of local merchants in Boston chartered the *Good Hope* to send supplies that arrived three days later. Several years later the first example of popular American support for a distress group on a national scale occurred with the extension of aid to the Greek independence movement during the 1820s. As "Greek Fever" spread in 1823 and 1824 a group of conservative-minded Americans insisted that it was too dangerous for popular emotions to sway the nature of support. In their view it was crucial for philanthropy to be handled by knowledgeable and competent individuals. By 1828 growing concerns about the organization of philanthropy were warranted. Since relief began some four years earlier the task of providing benevolent support had become increasingly complicated due to the presence of pirates that threatened ongoing shipments of relief and by the separate issues of making sure that those who were in need received aid alongside the problem of making sure a small supply of goods met a vast array of needs. The challenges Americans faced in supporting Greece had a marked impact on future philanthropic efforts abroad. Overall, American benevolence extended to Greece had a transitive effect by bringing domestic relief into an international orbit while pointing out the need for better means of organization and coordinating national efforts.<sup>6</sup>

American benevolence in Greece also marked a change in the nature of overseas philanthropy by serving as the first major episode in a series of separate, scattered, and limited

<sup>5</sup> Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 621. Loc cit, p. 623. Loc cit, p. 624.

<sup>6</sup> Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 13. Loc cit, p. 22. Loc cit, p. 27. Loc cit, p. 34. Loc cit, p. 40.

disasters that conjoined relief efforts with larger, national issues. The penultimate event in the first half of the nineteenth century that fostered widespread and intense American giving on a scale not yet seen was the Great Famine in Ireland. In scope the Irish potato famine in the 1840s generated the most impressive response to overseas suffering by Americans to date through the creation of the first national campaign to assist people in another nation without respect to political and nationalistic inclinations. While a nationwide benevolent movement was organized in 1845 and 1846 to assist beleaguered Irish its creation was not without its problems however. At home it was widely known that the failure of potato crops in Ireland was the immediate cause of famine in Ireland. Beyond that people's opinions on how to handle the situation varied greatly. In early 1847 supporters of relief unsuccessfully pressed Congress to appropriate funds for areas where food shortages were posing the greatest threat. Although both houses balked at offering official government support to assuage suffering in Ireland the Congress did offer indirect assistance by lending American war vessels to private interests in New York and Boston for transmitting provisions secured through relief committees.<sup>7</sup>

The refusal of the government to offer funding for Ireland had a significant impact on the organization of philanthropy. Once Congress denied appropriations for relief the burden of raising funds, buying provisions, and transporting supplies fell entirely upon voluntary efforts. Attempts to generate contributions varied from emotional appeals to indebtedness, fear, and guilt. One of the strongest motivations compelling individuals to support relief efforts for Ireland was the Christian duty of charity linked with the concept of humanitarianism. In appealing to the humanitarian aspect of individual's character many of the drives for support used concrete illustrations to sway people in ways that abstractions could not. Across the

<sup>7</sup> Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 40. Loc cit, p. 41. Loc cit, p. 64. Loc cit, p. 42. Support of Congressional relief for Ireland was divided among party lines—80 percent of Whigs supported the Bill while 84 percent of Democrats voted against it. Loc cit, p. 47-48. Loc cit, p. 49.

Atlantic, the Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends in Dublin emerged as the official private almoner for almost all voluntary aid apart from that dispensed by the Catholic Church and by varying government agencies. In organizing and coordinating relief from various multi-national groups the Central Relief Committee worked in cooperation with the British government to efficiently and cheerfully distribution voluntary relief offerings. Under its management supplies flowed from various locations to those whom the committee authorized to receive provisions.<sup>8</sup>

The American experience in providing relief for Ireland firmly established the role of voluntary agencies in the coordination of national philanthropic efforts. By being denied governmental funding and official support the menagerie of private organizations engaged in Irish relief began to recognize the need to improve their means of managing and coordinating their efforts. During the first half of the nineteenth century American philanthropy abroad was primarily handled by groups of businessmen trading with the region, government representatives, and church groups in a relatively proscribed manner with no systematic or sustained organizational structure in place. Slowly through philanthropic activity abroad Americans were learning that offering assistance to those in foreign lands required greater effort, organization, and leadership than did fund raising drives for worthy causes at home. They also learned that the problems of supervising the disbursement of relief abroad created an entirely new set of problems not easily solved.<sup>9</sup>

Both domestic and overseas philanthropy in America went through a series of transitions in the second half of the nineteenth century. After the Civil War there was an increasing

<sup>8</sup> Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 50. Loc cit, p. 50 and 51. Loc cit, p. 52. The use of concrete illustrations of suffering was a tactic that was employed in the future to generate support for various charitable causes—the CRB being one of those groups that made appeals of this type. Ibid, 61. The *American Whig Review* in December 1847 commented that the Central Relief Committee in Dublin did its work with “great sagacity and prudence.” Loc cit, p. 61-62.

<sup>9</sup> Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 21.

emphasis on materialism in American society marked by an adoption of pseudo-Darwinian interpretations of the laws of nature. One consequence of this ideological shift was the reluctant acceptance that the accumulation of a fortune was acceptable so long as it was given away in a manner that did not compromise the moral order of the community or society at large. It was this concept of generosity and the social acceptability of being wealthy that an expanding group of the affluent in America came to view as philanthropy. The changing concept of giving that developed during this era forced the traditional goals and institutions of charity in America to shift in order to satisfy the ambitions of an emerging philanthropic class whose values reflected a desire to provide philanthropic funding instead of mere charity. Within society this transition was not without its critics. Many of the new American philanthropists were recently minted captains of industry who were not well assimilated into the existing institutions and patterns of elite charitable activity. Compounding the difficulty was the fact that some of these individuals were making money faster than they could give it away.<sup>10</sup>

As they became a part of the greater tradition of American benevolence in the late nineteenth century these wealthy philanthropists struggled to fit their concepts of giving into broader cultural contexts. While these individuals recognized that they were indeed members of a ruling class in America they fancied themselves as an embattled segment of the population because of their wealth. For this reason many industrial philanthropists and later foundation philanthropists tended to avoid political entanglements if they could. It was only when regulation began to influence philanthropic activity that these men became more actively involved in the world of politics. Issues of republicanism and fundamental freedoms also influenced the behavior of the new benevolent class. Modern philanthropists (including Andrew

<sup>10</sup> Hamer, John H. *America, Philanthropy, and the Moral Order*. (Lewiston, UK: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), p. xi. Karl, Barry D. and Katz, Stanley N. "The American Private Philanthropic Foundation and the Public Sphere 1890-1930." *Minerva*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Summer 1981: 236-270, p. 243.



Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller) staunchly believed that the state intervention in their private activities would deprive them of the power and responsibility of deciding how their wealth should be used.<sup>11</sup>

The modern system of philanthropy still in place today began taking shape between the 1880s and WWI as multimillionaires and the affluent began to seek practical, socially useful ways of disposing surplus wealth. Both Carnegie and Rockefeller in particular distinguished between philanthropy and charity. Rockefeller declared that “the best philanthropy is not what is usually called charity.” Carnegie added that the worst thing a millionaire could do with his money was give it away to the irreclaimably poor. While donors held a personalized view of the appropriate use of wealth in their philanthropic pursuits they held a shared commitment to benevolence in wealth distribution. In general these individuals accepted the obligation of community responsibility that came along with their contributions.<sup>12</sup>

Other changes in the accepted modes of giving and the philosophy of philanthropy were occurring alongside the emergence of new sources of funding. As the nineteenth century came to a close the old, enlightened view of a natural order interpreted as harmony between the individual, community, and God was becoming less tenable. Increasingly it was accepted that the indomitable will of moral discipline and hard work could create private wealth that could benefit all. Possessing higher intellect the successful businessman was believed by modern philanthropists to be the appropriate trustee of wealth. Individuals including Carnegie believed that their job was to unleash the reasoning power of ordinary men and women through the appropriate use of wealth. In order to meet the needs of delegating responsibility, infusing

<sup>11</sup> Karl, Barry D. and Katz, Stanley N. “Foundations and the Ruling Class Elites.” *Daedalus*, Vol. 116, No. 1, Philanthropy, Patronage, Politics (Winter 1987): 1-40, p. 25. Karl and Katz, *Foundations and the Ruling Class Elites*, p. 25. Bremner, *Giving: Charity and Philanthropy in History*, p. 159.

<sup>12</sup> Bremner, *Giving: Charity and Philanthropy in History*, p. 159. Hamer, *America, Philanthropy, and the Moral Order*, p. 45.

expert knowledge, and adapting to the changing technological environment in America the traditional methods of management and control of philanthropy would have to change.<sup>13</sup>

Within this emerging structure a number of notable philanthropists rose to prominence. The first noteworthy post-Civil War philanthropist in this group was George Peabody. Before his death in 1869, Peabody gave over \$10,000,000 to various efforts. One of the issues that drew his attention was the necessity of inexpensive and decent living quarters for working class individuals. In 1862 he donated \$755,000 towards the project. Peabody was also concerned with the problem of poverty in London and gave more generously to the cause than any other American philanthropist in the nineteenth century. At home, he created the Peabody Education Fund in 1867 with assets of over \$2 million aimed at offering direct assistance to the South. After his passing the *Times* in London declared that there was nothing narrow about Peabody's giving and that his benevolence represented the discovery of a new motive for using wealth—the pleasure of giving it away.<sup>14</sup>

Andrew Carnegie began his philanthropic pursuits shortly after Peabody's passing. In distributing wealth he believed that should be given away in such a manner as to encourage self help and provide opportunities through which the poor who were ambitious could better themselves. Carnegie also contended that philanthropies both at home and abroad should enrich the culture of appreciation for the arts, music, and scientific research as a means to further individual and social progress. His "Gospel of Wealth" began with the insistence that a man of great wealth had an obligation to act as a steward for his less fortunate brethren. As steward the wealthy were then supposed to regard their money—except that necessary to make a modest

<sup>13</sup> Hamer, *America, Philanthropy, and the Moral Order*, p. 36. Loc cit, p. 104-105. Karl and Katz, *Foundations and the Ruling Class Elites*, p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 179. Loc cit, 180. Loc cit, 179. Kiger, *Philanthropic Foundations in the Twentieth Century*, p. 41. Further philanthropic assistance was offered to the south through the organization of the John F. Slater Found for the Education of Freedmen in the South with an endowment of \$1 million in 1882. Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 181.

living—as trust funds to be administered in a manner that would produce the most beneficial results for the community. In following this rationale the donor was required to avoid “indiscriminant charity” and in turn provide part of the means by which those who desired to improve may do so. As a philanthropist he preached that the extremely wealthy could do one of three things with their money: leave it to heirs, leave it for philanthropic and charitable purposes upon death, or use it for the same ends during their own lifetimes. In motivation Carnegie himself wanted to avoid the degradations of dying a wealthy man.<sup>15</sup>

The philanthropies of Andrew Carnegie encompassed a broad spectrum of projects and purposes including the advancement of learning, social welfare, world peace, and the related promotion of intercultural meaning. One of his first philanthropic activities was the construction of a library in his hometown of Dumfermline, Scotland in 1881. Several years later, Carnegie donated \$481,012 to build a library in Allegheny, PENN where his family settled in 1848. As the scope of his giving expanded Carnegie came to the realization that disposing of money philanthropically was a complicated business because the giving of money as mere charity was akin to throwing it away. In order to handle the benevolent funds properly he would have to distribute his wealth and knowledge to the community before death. This commitment required Carnegie to systematize and organize his philanthropic endeavors in a manner that in his opinion required greater wisdom, experience, and organization that the public could provide itself.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 188-189. Loc cit, p. 189. Of the \$350,000,000 he donated through various programs a total of \$62,000,000 was given throughout the British Empire. Lagemann, Ellen Condliffe. *The Politics of Knowledge: The Carnegie Corporation, Philanthropy, and Public Policy*. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), p. 15. Kiger, *Philanthropic Foundations in the Twentieth Century*, p. 42. Carnegie worried that leaving philanthropic money to heirs was likely to compromise its ability to provide for the creative self advancement of the individuals who were beneficiaries of the funding. Hamer, *America, Philanthropy, and the Moral Order*, p. 103. Loc cit, p. 100.

<sup>16</sup> Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 168. Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge*, p. 16. Hamer, *America, Philanthropy, and the Moral Order*, p. 103. The process Carnegie chose to employ was to provide education aimed at raising popular intelligence, talents, and tastes rather than just furthering material progress through building public libraries, scientific research institutions, and other public amenities

Behind his philanthropic giving, Carnegie worried that he would be personally tainted by the money that he worked so hard to earn. At the same time his worldly ambitions compelled his business practices and he relished on the entrepreneurial quest he promised to renounce in the “Gospel of Wealth.” While Carnegie was aware that he had used his talents to amass a large fortune he never fully believed that it was more than an instrument (contingent on his ability to organize) that made life more convenient and comfortable for humanity. Always in search of new ideas he wrote to friends asking them how they thought \$10 million could be best spent, adding with his characteristic ebullience “P.S. Prize for the best!” In public Carnegie’s boastful character, humor, and vanity gave his work a certain “Peter Pan quality.”<sup>17</sup>

To Carnegie philanthropy was serious business. It marked penance for idolatry and progress towards a world of reason, beauty, prosperity, and peace. In his gifts Carnegie attempted to organize them so that as many people as possible could pursue an autonomously defined search for culture and perfection. With this in mind Carnegie refused to stock the grant libraries he funded with books and did not provide money for maintenance. His hope was that these limitations would foster what he called “proprietorship” among the recipients of his grants.<sup>18</sup>

John D. Rockefeller was also convinced that his industrial activities served a purpose that ultimately benefitted mankind. He believed that God had given him great wealth and that through the Protestant ethic of austerity and thrift was the means for providing Christian charity. In character, thrift dominated Rockefeller’s personal life while generosity guided his philanthropic benevolence. A man of deep religious convictions, Rockefeller as a young adult

<sup>17</sup> Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge*, p. 13. Loc cit, 13-14. Hamer, *America, Philanthropy, and the Moral Order*, p. 109. Steel production and the profits it generated were based on the abilities, discipline, and sacrifice of individuals with the money symbolizing the fruits of their efforts. In Carnegie’s view this money should be returned to the laboring community to further their well being. Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge*, p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge*, p. 21. Loc cit, p. 23.

claimed that his great ambition to make money was rooted in a desire to pay off the mortgage of the church he attended in Cleveland, Ohio. He believed that all accumulated objects—including money—were a part of God’s gift to man that required stewardship because in society it was natural for the more dedicated to become wealthy while the careless and undisciplined remained poor. In handling his wealth Rockefeller experienced no internal tensions between the accumulation and distribution of wealth because he considered his talents for making money and giving it away a gift from God.<sup>19</sup>

Both Rockefeller and Carnegie followed specific principles regarding philanthropic activities. Rockefeller in particular supported self-help through programs that strengthened the individual and believed that social problems should be solved at the source rather than supplemented by kindhearted humanitarian charity. The immensity of his fortune created a unique set of challenges shared by other wealthy magnates like Carnegie. By the end of the nineteenth century that the vast size of his fortune made Rockefeller’s philanthropic endeavors a complicated business. In an attempt to combine his vision of philanthropy with the reality of giving Rockefeller hired Baptist Minister Frederick Gates to coordinate his benevolence. Under Gates’ management Rockefeller’s principles were turned into a system of scientific philanthropy aimed at resolving human problems through the development of research foundations.<sup>20</sup>

The coordination of Rockefeller benevolence by Frederick Gates was part of a larger movement in America to bring better organization to charity. In the post-Civil War era the demands of benevolence in the new industrial and urban milieus of America ultimately led to an

<sup>19</sup> Hamer, *America, Philanthropy, and the Moral Order*, p. 65. Loc cit, p. 61. Loc cit, p. 61-62. Loc cit, p. 62. Even after Rockefeller began giving away mass quantities of money the family was continually puzzled by the public hostility they received in their efforts to give money to public causes. Long before he became seriously interested in philanthropy Rockefeller believed that he was providing an important service to the community by producing cheap oil for the poor man while providing employment for many people at a fair wage. Karl and Katz, *Foundations and the Ruling Class Elites*, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> Hamer, *America, Philanthropy, and the Moral Order*, p. 63. Loc cit, p. 67.

examination of the prevailing methods of relief. The recognition that conventional methods of charity prevalent in the mid nineteenth century were incredibly wasteful and inefficient led to the launching of a charity organization society movement in the 1870s. Charity organization societies were created as devices to aid individuals who were willing to work collaboratively towards discovering on an need-by-need basis what was the best way out of a specific difficulty in a manner that assisted both those in need and the community at large. The origins of the charity organization movement were rooted in a series of problems dating back to the 1840s that stymied the effectiveness of charitable organizations. Pre-Civil War charities were plagued by a series of problems that at their base were attributable to a lack of coordination, vision, and planning. During this period charities rarely kept their activities in step with the original premises under which the society was founded. Compounding their difficulties was the issue that there were no adequate safeguards against deception, fraud, and the duplication of services within a given community. While these charitable organizations were committed to meeting obvious distress they were admittedly unable to meet situations that required large financial contributions and continuous, ongoing management.<sup>21</sup>

Several causes contributed to the rise of the charity organization movement in the early 1870s. One of the leading factors was the influence of the panic of 1873 and the following financial depression in America. From these financial burdens a citizen motive emerged that engendered a desire to more effectively discharge the social obligations incident to republican citizenship. The charity organization movement in America marked the introduction of a new method of utilizing existing charitable forces and resources within the community. By the conclusion of WWI the movement had so profoundly impacted the social thought of the era that

<sup>21</sup> Watson, *The Charity Organization Movement in the United States*, p. 173. Loc cit, p. 106. Loc cit, p. 89. Loc cit, p. 89-90.

many of its methods were directly employed by diverse groups ranging from child welfare services, hospital social service departments, and juvenile courts to the American Red Cross. Underlying its application of its emphasis on organization to a multitude of situations was the new commitment of organized charity to take some of the guesswork out of giving by using almoners to make charitable decisions based on the gathering and usage of important data.<sup>22</sup>

In the late nineteenth century charities of all kinds were in need of internal reform and external facelifts. By the 1880s traditional charities were just as unpopular in the benevolence community as millionaire philanthropists. To combat poor reputations many relief agencies in American cities banded together in federations patterned after the London Charity Organization in order to eliminate duplications of effort and to reduce competition among its constituents. These organized charities attempted to bring a sense of discipline to the charitable impulses of ordinary donors by replacing casual giving with systematic and scientific methods of distinguishing between the deserving and undeserving through registration, investigation, and counseling. By the 1890s the dominant motivation of the charity organization movement was to see out and strike effectively at the particular causes of dependence and intolerable living conditions prevalent society that existed beyond the control of the individuals involved.<sup>23</sup>

While industrial philanthropists and charity organization societies combated the problems of society within the United States there were also problems that arose overseas that called for

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<sup>22</sup> Watson, *The Charity Organization Movement in the United States*, p. 214. Charity organization societies at first appeared in the larger centers of population in America because it was in these locations that the old social relationships between the well-to-do and the less fortunate fragmented more completely and more quickly. Loc cit, p. 3. Bremner, *Giving: Charity and Philanthropy in History*, p. 164.

<sup>23</sup> Bremner, *Giving: Charity and Philanthropy in History*, p. 159. The London Charity Organization Society (COS) was created in April 1869 to deal with the age-old problem of pauperism and poverty caused in the late 1860s triggered by the large impact the Civil War had on British industry. Between 1860 and 1869 the number of persons supported by official charity within the city rose from 85,000 to 120,000. Watson, *The Charity Organization Movement in the United States*, p. 53. The London COS was created simply to organize relief. It based its justification for existence on the opportunities it provided to promote marked efficiency in charitable giving. Loc cit, p. 60. Bremner, *Giving: Charity and Philanthropy in History*, p. 159-160. Watson, *The Charity Organization Movement in the United States*, p. 330-331.

American philanthropic support. In October 1891, Minister Charles Emory Smith reported to the State Department that crop failures put some 13,700,000 people in Russia on the verge of starvation. Given the situation it was estimated that even a donation of two million pounds of bread costing upwards of \$25 million could not prevent widespread death. Two months later American William C. Edgar spearheaded an effort to provide food relief for Russia. In a popular appeal for support he pointed out among other things that Americans had far more wheat, corn, and flour than they could possibly consume. As editor of the *Northwest Miller*, Edgar proposed that every reader give a few sacks of low-grade flour to Russia so that peasants would not be forced to eat bread made of bark flavored with ground peas.<sup>24</sup>

Edgar's appeal to the general public was matched in organization by a plan to efficiently coordinate the shipping and distribution of food relief to Russia. To further promote the practicality of the scheme the *Northwest Miller* appealed to American railroads for free passage of the flour collected to New York City and asked that the Russian government provide freight for shipment of the relief. Recognizing the criticism that the program was bound to face, Edgar took every possible precaution to assure that relief collected for Russia would not be handled inefficiently or dubiously. To assure the proper handling of relief an official of the American Red Cross along with a member of the staff of the *Northwest Miller* were appointed to personally accompany the relief shipment and check on the distribution of the provisions by the Russian Red Cross and the czarist government.<sup>25</sup>

The response to Edgar's appeal for support and his organizational strategies for handling relief was tremendous. The Pillsbury-Washburn flour mills in Minneapolis responded immediately with an offering of 800 sacks of flour. Eight other mills quickly follow suit with

<sup>24</sup> Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 99. Loc cit, p. 101.

<sup>25</sup> Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 102.



donations varying from 100 to 600 sacks. On February 12, 1892 the *Northwest Miller* announced that the foreign freight agents of the New York Central and Atlantic Transport Lines had offered the use of the steamer *Missouri*. Edgar commented that “we have demonstrated that nowhere else but in America could such an undertaking be successfully carried out in eight short weeks.” In total a cargo estimated at 5,600,000 pounds representing 800 subscriptions from twenty-five states and territories made the journey to Russia aboard the *Missouri*. The *New York World* estimated the value of the millers’ contribution at \$100,000. Combined with an additional \$67,000 incurred in transportation, insurance, and other costs associated with shipping the total value of Russian relief was \$167,000.<sup>26</sup>

While William Edgar and the *Northwest Miller* were completing their drive for relief supplies the former governor of the Wyoming territory John Hoyt took the lead in organizing the Russian Famine Committee of the United States. Designed to awaken greater public interest in the plight of Russia and to facilitate cooperation between local movements the committee publicized the slogan “Grain from the West, money for the cost of transportation to the East.” The committee was also part of an unsuccessful effort to secure a joint congressional authorization for the transport of voluntary food contributions by the US Navy. By early spring 1892 it was clear that the program to support Russia would have to be carried out by voluntary efforts exclusively. Supporters doubled their efforts to maintain the support of potential donors and to fight the perception that famine relief would only relieve an unjust Russian regime from shouldering responsibility for its problems and enacting reforms. In total when the program

<sup>26</sup> Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 103. Loc cit, p. 112. Loc cit, p. 112-113. Each package of cornmeal included circulars printed in Russian giving directions for its use. Loc cit, p. 113. Before contributions concluded, American donations to Russia neared \$1 million. Loc cit, p. 115.

concluded in 1893 it not only combated widespread famine in Russia but also sparked a growing interest among Americans in the needs of other peoples.<sup>27</sup>

As the nineteenth century closed the system of American philanthropy overseas expanded to include a wider range of projects as the United States became a world power. In this program disaster relief and aid to foreign missions were only part of an ever-increasing program of American benevolence. As the century concluded many Americans also donated money for the creation of schools, hospitals, art galleries, orphan asylums, and projects aimed at mitigating poverty abroad. The trend towards overseas giving for welfare and education also gained momentum in large part due to the important segment of the American philanthropic community that possessed great amounts of wealth and possessed a personal tie to a specific foreign country.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile at home the role of systemization and expertise played an increasingly important role in the development of American philanthropy. As the US moved from a preindustrial and industrial state to a post industrial state the concept of knowledge joined land, labor, and capital as a critical national resource. In this environment the management of an enterprise required specialized, expert knowledge in order to guide and justify its goals, choices, and policies governing action. Philanthropy in America itself passed through the same stages as other sciences had done previously. In the 1890s, benevolence attempted to mirror the field of medicine by using traditional experience, accurate records, comparison of treatment, accepted principles, systematic diagnosis, hygiene, and prevention to improve the process. It was during

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<sup>27</sup>Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 109. With prominent politicians among its members the Russian Famine Committee urged governors across the country to follow the example set by the state commission of Iowa in coordinating relief, enlisting the press, and stimulating fund raising through public meetings. Loc cit, p. 105. The main argument against the resolution was that Congress had no power to spend taxpayer's money for such purposes. In general Republicans supported the resolution while Democrats did not. Loc cit, p. 106. Loc cit, p. 108. Loc cit, p. 119.

<sup>28</sup> Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 175.

this period of development that individuals employed by charities began considering themselves professionals.<sup>29</sup>

As the twentieth century began the awareness of a small group of Americans that the older system of charitable support and local reform was failing marked the transition of benevolence from private, localized charity to foundations. Just as managers of the evolving corporate structure in the United States strove to rationalize and streamline systems of production so too did the new breed of foundation executives that began coordinating charity in the first decade of the 1900s. These individuals pressed for the rationalization of social services and a more efficient and manageable system of national benevolence. The progressive era emphasis on efficiency, elimination of waste, alleviation of mass misery, and the establishment of a more humane, decent, and just society was internalized by the managers of philanthropic foundations in certain cases more coherently and completely than their corporate counterparts.<sup>30</sup>

Perceptions regarding the future of benevolence underwent sweeping changes as philanthropists reevaluated the nature of benevolence in American society. In general members of the new philanthropic class sought to transform the ways that wealth could be used to solve major problems. Medicine provided philanthropy with their first ideal model of how to bring scientific understanding to their work primarily because its metaphors for describing illness and disease were easily transferrable to societal blight. In the early twentieth century the emerging concept of modern philanthropy rested on a recognition of progress and choice that made the eradication of poverty possible through systematic, scientific human endeavors.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge*, p. 4. Watson, *The Charity Organization Movement in the United States*, p. 333.

<sup>30</sup> Berman, Edward H. *The Influence of the Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller Foundations on American Foreign Policy: The Ideology of Philanthropy*. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983), p. 17. Karl and Katz, *The American Private Philanthropic Foundation and the Public Sphere 1890-1930*, p. 242-243. Karl and Katz, *Foundations and the Ruling Class Elites*, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Karl and Katz, *Foundations and the Ruling Class Elites*, p. 5. Loc cit, p. 6.

At the same time industrial philanthropists faced increased scrutiny as reformers searched for new ways to appropriate wealth through taxes and other seemingly preferable means of allowing the public to control the benefits of private fortunes. When the first American philanthropic foundations were created they sought to stabilize the rapidly evolving corporate order and legitimize their actions before the American general public. Through the support of educational institutions these foundations endeavored to create a worldwide network of elites whose approach to governance and change would be efficient, professional, moderate, incremental, and nonthreatening to the class interests of those who established the trusts. Through the funding of American colleges and universities the trusts sought to gain a larger influence in the creation of social and governmental policy by training the professionals and managers that would then run the institutions of the liberal capitalist state.<sup>32</sup>

The development of foundations and a continued commitment to private philanthropy in America was due in large part to the tradition of federalism in the United States that fueled a general unwillingness among Americans to surrender to the government the authority to set national standards of social well being. Federal financial support in America was traditionally deemed to be supplementary rather than a controlling force in state and local policies. In the philanthropic community private organizations supported by groups of well-to-do citizens and religious groups worked jointly with agencies managed by local communities that bore the major responsibility for dealing with those needing assistance. The result was a conflict between a growing consciousness among the elite of modern industrial reformers desiring national programs of social welfare and the general political culture in America that would not accept a government control over such reforms. It was out of this clash that the modern foundation

<sup>32</sup> Karl and Katz, *Foundations and the Ruling Class Elites*, p. 8. Berman, *The Influence of the Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller Foundations on American Foreign Policy*, p. 15. Loc cit, p. 18.

emerged—creating a system of national philanthropy privately devoted to increasing the welfare of society.<sup>33</sup>

Philanthropic foundations were a uniquely American development. Privately funded trusts in the early twentieth century found a way of doing privately what governments in other advanced industrial societies were beginning to do in Europe publicly. Programs such as Carnegie Libraries served as a model for collaboration between private funds and public interests. Applied to overseas benevolence, Herbert Hoover's belief that governments being aided abroad should be prepared to match contributions made from private, external sources was part of the emerging American philanthropic tradition that assured benefactors that the community being helped was willing to take action in its own support. Traditional concerns about the way that funds were collected and used also played a large role in the creation of trust. Tax considerations were another motivating factor in the creation of foundations. Taxation was an issue that the multitude of classes in America had been arguing over for decades. Long accustomed to forming local watchdog agencies to superintend the spending of tax funds, the attitudes of the trusts towards social spending reflected the belief that local support for measures was far more effective than federal support because it could be controlled more effectively by the immediate citizenry.<sup>34</sup>

The traditional structure of charities also contributed to the creation of American philanthropic foundations. Pre-existing charitable institutions in the nineteenth century were narrowly focused on particular problems and were committed to cautious and well-tried courses of action. Generally these organizations were directed by quasi or semi-professionals and elites

<sup>33</sup> Karl and Katz, *The American Private Philanthropic Foundation and the Public Sphere 1890-1930*, p. 237. Loc cit, p. 239. Loc cit, p. 238.

<sup>34</sup> Karl and Katz, *The American Private Philanthropic Foundation and the Public Sphere 1890-1930*, p. 260. Karl and Katz, *Foundations and the Ruling Class Elites*, p. 9.

who were not likely to change their goals or patterns of behavior radically in any given situation. Although a good deal of effort went into the rationalization of their efforts during the charity organization movement the traditional means of benevolence were still firmly entrenched as the twentieth century began. Breaking the cycle of American philanthropy required the creation of new institutional forms—the endowed trust in particular.<sup>35</sup>

The creators of philanthropic foundations in America brought the business principles guiding their financial interests into the world of benevolence. Committed to rationality, organization, and efficiency these individuals saw no reason why their charitable actions should not be guided by the same principles as their business concerns. In their view the task of giving away money almost necessitated the rationalization of charity. They believed that a more thoroughly scientific approach was the best means to attack the root causes of social dysfunction. The philanthropic foundation was also advantageous for donors. Their support was drawn in part from individual's desire to support perpetual trusts unbound by specific purposes. Given many donors admiration for the scientific and technological advances of the era they were prepared to accept widespread change in the philanthropic community offered by foundations that traditional forms of charity could not hope to achieve.<sup>36</sup>

The status of politics and reform in America also played a prominent role in the emergence of philanthropic foundations. Trusts appeared alongside the attempts of progressives to evolve a liberal consensus and chart a more equitable political and economic path for the United States. Within the movement the more far-sighted progressives recognized that a societal consensus could only be achieved if the extremes of poverty and wealth were somewhat mitigated through benevolence. At the same time there was a general agreement among

<sup>35</sup> Karl and Katz, *The American Private Philanthropic Foundation and the Public Sphere 1890-1930*, p. 244.

<sup>36</sup> Karl and Katz, *The American Private Philanthropic Foundation and the Public Sphere 1890-1930*, p. 243. Loc cit, p. 243-244. Karl and Katz, *Foundations and the Ruling Class Elites*, p. 7.

reformers that the most flagitious abuses associated with the system of industrial capitalism needed to be checked as well. For others the fear of socialism led to the support of foundations. Since the late 1870s, increasing labor unrest coupled with a growing awareness of urban poverty and its consequences led many who were critical of conditions in the factories and cities to predict some sort of socialist upheaval in America.<sup>37</sup>

Once in place foundations were an opportunity for the corporate form of charity to play a major role in clearing the way for the modern capitalist state by influencing social policy and government action. Part of the rationale behind the creation of trusts was the desire to give industrial society an educated class that would continue to produce researchers, teachers, and managers in the spheres of culture and technology. Through their benevolent activity the creators of foundations and their successors showed a demonstrated commitment in one way or another to the American system of government. At the same time, trust directors believed that the political parties in America were not equipped to solve social problems efficiently or economically. In their view a system of welfare capitalism held little promise for a bright future. They believed that continued investment in industrial expansion would produce the profits to support labor and wages. Populists countered that foundations represented the investment of ill-gotten gains in a manner that threatened to subvert the democratic process by giving philanthropists a determining role in the conduct of American public life.<sup>38</sup>

Forged in the economic battles of the Progressive Era the foundation was a new form of philanthropy representing the perceived benefits of corporate management applied to

<sup>37</sup> Berman, *The Influence of the Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller Foundations on American Foreign Policy*, p. 16. Karl and Katz, *Foundations and the Ruling Class Elites*, p. 17.

<sup>38</sup> Karl and Katz, *The American Private Philanthropic Foundation and the Public Sphere 1890-1930*, p. 247. Karl and Katz, *Foundations and the Ruling Class Elites*, p. 31. Loc cit, p. 34. Loc cit, p. 34-35. Karl and Katz, *The American Private Philanthropic Foundation and the Public Sphere 1890-1930*, p. 248. On a different note, Labor leader Eugene V. Debs called for the outright rejection of Carnegie Libraries claiming that after the socialist revolution in America there would be plenty of books to read.

benevolence. By definition philanthropic foundations are non-governmental, non-profit organizations with funds of their own provided for by donors managed by an independent group of trustees or directors with a program designed to maintain or aid socially useful activities. In organization the philanthropic foundation represents the fusion of traditional charitable organizations and ancient methods of perpetuating wealth with novel social, legal, and intellectual ideas. Their attempts to coordinate charity organizations so that they could better serve the needs of the poor were in keeping with the liberal reform tendencies of the Progressive Era. The need to coordinate and professionalize the field of social work so that its pervading ideology would be one of limited reform within a framework of corporate capitalism led the trustees of organizations such as the Russell Sage Foundation (created in 1907) to begin subsidizing projects with a goal of insuring that social change was carried out in a way that would not threaten the evolving economic order in America or the privileged position of those of the elite philanthropic class.<sup>39</sup>

Inside this emerging system the rise of bureaucracy and bureaucratic thinking in America played an important role in the development of trust philanthropy. According to historian Robert Wiebe the goal at the heart of progressivism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was the desire to fulfill the destiny of reform ideals through bureaucratic means. In the new urban-industrial environment of America the system of bureaucratic thinking was in Wiebe's view particularly suited to the fluidity and impersonality of the city and factory floor. Once applied to social issues the influence of bureaucratic thinking was immediate as individuals increasingly came to view society as a vast tissue of reciprocal activity instead of an infinite

<sup>39</sup> Karl and Katz, *Foundations and the Ruling Class Elites*, p. 20. Kiger, *Philanthropic Foundations in the Twentieth Century*, p. 1. Karl and Katz, *The American Private Philanthropic Foundation and the Public Sphere 1890-1930*, p. 245. Berman, *The Influence of the Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller Foundations on American Foreign Policy*, p. 19. Sage-funded efforts to create a professional, middle and upper class force of social workers who subscribed to the major outlines of the system of corporate capitalism was an important component in determining the parameters of social work in the early twentieth century. Loc cit, p. 20.



number of one-on-one relationships. In the realm of reform bureaucratic thought signaled a transition from simple moral precepts to an emphasis on complex procedural principles administered by experts. With an embedded sense of scientific analysis first applied to urban political reform, city beautification movements, and case work the arrival of foundation philanthropy presaged the transition from makeshift, short-term philanthropy towards a continuous application of funds for less determinate objectives.<sup>40</sup>

The work of foundations performed deeds that were unachievable for private, small scale philanthropic organizations in the early twentieth century. In America the rise of industrialization, technological change, and the establishment of a national economy operating in an increasingly international market left few alternatives for coping with major welfare issues under the previously existing practices of benevolence. At the same time the federal government was not in a position to bring wide sweeping change. Situated in both the public and private spheres the foundations were strategically positioned to play a pivotal role in determining what knowledge, ideas, and what views would received support and become a part of society's general discourse. In the early days of existence many of philanthropic foundations pursued a number of different benevolent options before settling on a structure supporting general purposes through funding for universities, research universities, reform trusts, and social work institutions.<sup>41</sup>

While foundation philanthropies were private organizations they were at the same time engaged in a process of influencing the formulation of policies that affected the public in ways. Private philanthropy was forced to accept the fluctuations of public opinion which swung in

<sup>40</sup> Wiebe, Robert H. *The Search for Order: 1877-1920*. (New York: Hill and Wang Publishing, 1967), p. 166. Loc cit, p. 145. Loc cit, p. 149. Loc cit, p. 150.

<sup>41</sup> Karl and Katz, *Foundations and the Ruling Class Elites*, p. 36. Berman, *The Influence of the Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller Foundations on American Foreign Policy*, p. 13. Karl and Katz, *The American Private Philanthropic Foundation and the Public Sphere 1890-1930*, p. 245-246. Once in place the foundations named leading figure in law, banking, and academia to be trustees. In search for future directors they selected protégés from Eastern private colleges to join their ranks. Karl and Katz, *Foundations and the Ruling Class Elites*, p. 30.

favor and against their actions as a result. Operating in tumultuous environment of public opinion in the progressive era the attempt on the part of foundations to conduct their activities on a national scale while trying to win political recognition for doing so raised the issue of whether or not the traditional relationship between philanthropy and the government was transferrable from the local level to the federal government.<sup>42</sup>

Several key factors contributed to the increasing influence that foundations wielded in determining foreign and domestic policy. First, their possession of significant amounts of capital which could be allocated for the direct purposes of trust directors made them powerful. Secondly, their ability to allocate this capital to certain individuals and groups strategically located in the cultural sphere provided an important source of legitimization for their philanthropic goals. Third, their direct connection with the decision making components of the capitalist state made them influential. Fourth, their shared view that the development of domestic and foreign policy could be best advanced through the aegis of worldwide capitalism was well supported within the government and among the American people.<sup>43</sup>

Efforts by Rockefeller and Carnegie to create an open connection with the federal government were in the end vehemently rejected however. From their creation the foundation philanthropies and the federal government had the same sort of uneasy relationship as reformers did with politicians. What brought the two divergent groups together from time to time was the use of outside sources of advice combined with foundation funding to make the public believe that something was being done to cope with national issues. While trusts were forced to interact with the government they still functioned as an independent agent with the goal that neither

<sup>42</sup> Karl and Katz, *The American Private Philanthropic Foundation and the Public Sphere 1890-1930*, p. 258. Loc cit, p. 258-259. Loc cit, p. 255.

<sup>43</sup> Berman, *The Influence of the Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller Foundations on American Foreign Policy*, p. 38. Karl and Katz, *Foundations and the Ruling Class Elites*, p. 33.

politics nor profits would shape the direction of intellectual and cultural growth in America. Regardless of the situation foundation philanthropists in the end trusted their own judgment.<sup>44</sup>

Within the foundation structure of philanthropy the wealth of Andrew Carnegie for example was distributed in four major areas including libraries, peace projects, education and research, pensions, and personal benefits. In 1901, he sold his steel interests to J.P. Morgan for \$480 million and retired from business with an excess profit of \$225 million. The Carnegie Institution of Washington was created a year later to perform philanthropic work with an initial endowment of \$10 million. Carnegie's philanthropic interests varied over the next few years before the creation of Carnegie Corporation of New York in 1911. One of the benefactions that gave him the deepest sense of satisfaction was the Hero Fund Commission set up in 1904 with an endowment of \$5 million earmarked for individuals injured while performing heroic deeds and for widows and dependents of those lost in the act of heroism. Ultimately, Carnegie was most famous for his library gifts of \$60 million for the construction of facilities under the stipulation that recipients provided funds for the purchase of books and maintenance of the building.<sup>45</sup>

In 1911, the Carnegie Corporation became the largest foundation created to date with an initial endowment of \$125 million. Chartered to "promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding among the people of the United States" the corporation became heavily involved in the politics of knowledge. With a goal of advancing and diffusing knowledge and understanding the corporation's self-imposed mandate to define, develop, and

<sup>44</sup> Karl and Katz, *Foundations and the Ruling Class Elites*, p. 33. Loc cit, p. 35.

<sup>45</sup> Hamer, *America, Philanthropy, and the Moral Order*, p. 101. Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge*, p. 20. Kiger, *Philanthropic Foundations in the Twentieth Century*, p. 42. Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 195. The Hero Fund was evidence of Carnegie's conviction that whereas heroes of the past wounded or killed enemies, those of his own civilized time served and saved others. Hamer, *America, Philanthropy, and the Moral Order*, p. 101. It should be noted that sometimes the library grant stipulations were violated. Some complained that libraries were sometimes sparsely used or became the virtual property of the more educated and affluent members of the community. At times books were not bought for a library or made available for the general consumer while library buildings were frequently used for purposes other than culture. It was not a rare occurrence for annual maintenance pledges to fall short of their goals. Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge*, p. 24.

distribute knowledge was in a sense a franchise to govern in an important indirect manner. Carnegie personally directed the foundation until his death in 1919. During this eight year period the character of the corporation reflected his unshakable belief in late nineteenth century British liberalism and from his broad approach to benevolence entire consistent with his conceptions of distributive rather than regulatory policy making. Through Carnegie's influence the corporation's commitment to liberalism was manifest in a clearly defined series of values that were sustained through time. The first value reflected a belief in the individual's need for freedom to strive, improve, and advance in education. The second value recognized that liberty without equality would result in an unstable and oppressive society in which liberty itself would be insecure. The third value projected a conviction that individualism, liberty, and equal opportunity could be best preserved and advanced in a society where voluntary action and a consensus about the direction of the nation would preclude a monopoly of power under the auspices of governmental agencies.<sup>46</sup>

Popular enlightenment as the key to social progress was a major contributing factor to Carnegie's benevolent motivations. He also maintained that giving must broaden opportunities for those on the lower rungs of society. As a result, Carnegie paralleled many of his gifts in America with similar ones in Canada, Australia, Great Britain, and Ireland. His donations of funds for libraries across the British Empire accounted for approximately thirty-seven percent of the \$56,162,623 given in total for this purpose. In support of education Carnegie also established the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching with an endowment of \$15,000,000 earmarked for retirement provisions in 1911. The previous year he established the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace with \$10 million in assets devoted to the juridical approach

<sup>46</sup> Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge*, p. 3 and Kiger, *Philanthropic Foundations in the Twentieth Century PFTC*, p. 42. In 1919, another \$10.3 million was added to the corporation's endowment after Carnegie's death. Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge*, p. 3. Loc cit, p. 3 and 6. Loc cit, p. 5-6. Loc cit, p. 6. Loc cit, p. 9.

to the problem of peace and war. In the 1910s, his major interests continued to be popular education and welfare. In October 1913, the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust was created with the broad design of improving the well being of Great Britain and Ireland through such means embraced in the meaning of the word “charitable” with an endowment of \$10 million.<sup>47</sup>

In the last decade of his life Carnegie spent enormous amounts of time and energy towards giving away his fortune. By 1911, his donations of \$180 million still left nearly half of his wealth untouched however. Increasingly, Carnegie worried that he would fall short of his pledge to divest his money before death. With that in mind he decided to transfer most of the remaining money to the foundation. In doing so Carnegie hoped to be able to continue to personally supervise his fortune during his lifetime and make sure that it would continue to be put to good use after his passing.<sup>48</sup>

During this same period the foundational philanthropy of John D. Rockefeller began in 1901 with the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research in 1901 and the General Education Board in 1902. Similar to Carnegie, he advocated the establishment of trusts as a way of managing the business of benevolence properly and effectively. According to Allen Nevins, Rockefeller wanted to give to well established causes and institutions in a way that would stimulate other gifts and enlist numerous supporters. In general he sought to support the

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<sup>47</sup> Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 191. Some 2,509 libraries were built in the US and the British Empire. Applicants had to meet two grant requirements: a town-owned building site and a willingness to pledge annual maintenance funds (to be raised through taxation equivalent to 10 percent of the sum Carnegie would donate). Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge*, p. 17. Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 193 and Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge*, p. 22. Institutions could qualify for foundation funding based on academic standards and secular character. Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 197. The endowment also promoted international exchanges of lecturers in the pursuit of peace. Loc cit, p. 194. By the early 1920s the Carnegie Trust for Universities in Scotland had contributed \$15 million to Scottish universities. Loc cit, p. 192.

<sup>48</sup> Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge*, p. 12. Of this total approximately \$6.5 million was used to purchase more than 7,600 organs for small churches. Loc cit, p. 19.

soundest forms of benevolence. Rockefeller also sought to forge a direct relationship with the government through the creation of the Rockefeller Foundation in 1913.<sup>49</sup>

In the twentieth century the new industrial elite took part in the national development of a more effective collaboration between the federal government and industry. Rockefeller himself advocated national charters for business corporations to enable them to deal more directly with Washington on those aspects of regulation and rationalization that they were finding useful.<sup>50</sup> Even progressives who decried the evils of trusts were attracted to the same conception of efficient management and productivity that the men who built them were seeking. Under similar business-based pretenses the Rockefeller Foundation was initially intended to be a government corporation headed by a board. Under this structure the US Congress was to be given the power to impose limitations on the objects of the corporation if it was determined so in the public's interest. Congress ultimately rejected the proposal however. In 1915 the Walsh Commission labeled the emerging philanthropic foundations in America as thinly disguised capitalist manipulations of the social order. Senator Frank B. Walsh himself contended that the hearings led him to challenge the wisdom of giving public sanction to foundations because it appeared that large philanthropic trusts were a menace to the welfare of society.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Kiger, *Philanthropic Foundations in the Twentieth Century*, p. 42. Bremner, *Giving: Charity and Philanthropy in History*, p. 170. Rockefeller said "let us be as careful with the money we would spend for the benefit of others as if we were laying it aside for our own family's future use." Rockefeller also desired that his undertakings would persist after his support was concluded.

<sup>50</sup> Karl and Katz, *The American Private Philanthropic Foundation and the Public Sphere 1890-1930*, p. 254.

<sup>51</sup> Karl and Katz, *The American Private Philanthropic Foundation and the Public Sphere 1890-1930*, p. 254. At the same time critics including George Bernard Shaw were vocal about the alleged pauperization in America caused by millionaires. In "Socialism for Millionaires" (1896) he exposed the tendency of taxpayers to rely on philanthropic grants or subsidies for support of necessary institutions such as schools and hospitals. Bremner, *Giving: Charity and Philanthropy in History*, p. 161-162. Shaw believed that the honest, industrious, and aspiring poor were in his opinion the least in need of help and at the same time the most likely to be demoralized by it. Loc cit, p. 161. Karl and Katz, *Foundations and the Ruling Class Elites*, p. 11. Karl and Katz, *The American Private Philanthropic Foundation and the Public Sphere 1890-1930*, p. 250. The actual name of the investigation was the Commission on Industrial Relations launched by Senator Frank P. Walsh to determine the causes of widespread industrial unrest that culminated with the violent strike at the Rockefeller owned Colorado Fuel and Iron Company known as the "Ludlow Massacre." Kiger, *Philanthropic Foundations in the Twentieth Century*, p. 22-23. The majority report of the Walsh

Americans continued to give money to foreign projects alongside the growing proliferation of philanthropic trusts at home. In general the patterns of giving for welfare and culture overseas did not change markedly in the first decade of the twentieth century. While trends remained relatively stable there was a general anticipation that change would happen as the well-to-do in America became increasingly involved in benevolence alongside the reorganization of numerous charities and the rise of the foundations. Opportunities for the expansion of giving abroad were not simply limited to needs within the new territories acquired by the United States. Natural disasters for example were a continued source of American benevolence. The steady stream of overseas charity from America in the early twentieth century is partly attributable to better forms of international communication, general domestic prosperity, and the growing interest of the State Department in American relief activities dealing with overseas catastrophes.<sup>52</sup>

While the number of overseas charity opportunities increased the general patterns of benevolence stayed the same. In general the communities having a special proximity, connection, or obligation to a beleaguered nation played a more active role in relief projects than other interests. Early twentieth century disasters in Martinique (1902), Finland (1903), China (1901), Chile (1906), Sicily and Calabria (1908), Jamaica (1907), Mexico (1909), Costa Rica (1910), Haiti (1915), Guatemala (1915), and San Salvador (1917) provided Americans with opportunities to provide assistance to those in need. To meet the challenges created by these disasters the established agencies of fund raising and relief activities swung into action.

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Commission charged that the great corporate interests were endeavoring to shape the educational and social life of the country by controlling the nation's colleges and universities through grants. It also pointed out that the income from the Rockefeller and Carnegie Foundations alone were twice as great as the government's appropriations for education and social services. The committee worried that because of their financial strength the social policies of the American government would inevitably reflect the policies of the great corporations and those who controlled them. Loc cit, p. 24.

<sup>52</sup> Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 183. Loc cit, p. 208.

Philanthropic foundations in this period also became involved in overseas charity. Concerned with the living conditions among the civilian populations of both allied and central powers during WWI, the Rockefeller Foundation in October 1914 appointed a War Relief Commission under the leadership of Dr. Wicklyffe Rose. During the conflict the WRC played a significant role in relief activities by allocating a total of \$22 million. In the early stages of WWI, WRC-sponsored relief included the chartering of food ships and the providing of funds for relief to occupied Belgium. By early 1915 this relationship had ended.<sup>53</sup>

In the venue of overseas relief the American Red Cross played an increasingly vital role from the late nineteenth century forward. After the Spanish-American War (1898) the Red Cross steadily moved to the front as a major agency of foreign benevolence despite the fact that its activities were limited to fund raising. Nonetheless, both before and after its reorganization in 1905 the Red Cross was free to respond to request for help in natural disasters insofar as its resources permitted. At the same time it was less free to act in the face of overseas civil disturbances however. When national interests involving foreign policy and security became involved the Red Cross tended to serve as an arm of the federal government.<sup>54</sup>

Originally organized in 1881 the Red Cross was granted a special charter by Congress in 1905 allowing it to pursue a system of national and international relief in times of peace by mitigating suffering caused by pestilence, famine, floods, and other national calamities. Under these premises the Red Cross contributed \$1,640,186 to natural disaster relief abroad between

<sup>53</sup> Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 215. Loc cit, p. 208-211. Loc cit, p. 213. Loc cit, p. 228.

<sup>54</sup> Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 217-218. The exception to this fund raising role was when it was allowed to take to the field after the Italian earthquake disaster in the first decade of the twentieth century. Loc cit, p. 218.



1898 and WWI. Some of this effort was made possible by its 1905 reorganization that brought closer and more effective relations between national, state, and local auxiliaries.<sup>55</sup>

On the eve of WWI American philanthropy was poorly prepared for large scale funding and relief programs abroad. In 1914, the Red Cross for example had only 150 chapters and 20,000 members despite the progress that had been made over the previous decade. When war began it immediately appealed to its constituent chapters to raise funds for relief. To meet the demand the Red Cross divided the country into thirteen districts with some 15,000 local branches. The problem was that where social work was not previously organized the Home Service of the Red Cross had to break entirely new ground.<sup>56</sup>

Into the void left by American philanthropy stepped the Commission for Relief in Belgium. Author Merle Curti in *American Philanthropy Abroad* commented that Belgium would have starved without the brilliant help of Hoover and his associates. He added that the most extensive, ingenious, and statesmanlike program during the period of American neutrality in WWI was in Belgium. During WWI the CRB overshadowed all other American philanthropic enterprises involved in the conflict, including the Clearing House and the Rockefeller Foundation.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Watson, *The Charity Organization Movement in the United States*, p. 377. Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 218.

<sup>56</sup> Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 226. Watson, *The Charity Organization Movement in the United States*, p. 437. Loc cit, p. 437-438.

<sup>57</sup> Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, p. 235. Loc cit, p. 231. Loc cit, p. 237-238.

## CHAPTER TWO: “Immediate Action is Imperative”

### The Invasion of Belgium

Belgium’s direct involvement in World War One began with an ultimatum from Germany on August 2, 1914. On Monday evening, August 3, 1914, the Belgian government issued a dignified response to the ultimatum, stating that it refused to break prior engagements and would resist German aggression. In Brussels, the Belgian government received a note from Herr von Below at six o’clock in the morning on August 4, that Germany could take what it wanted by “force of arms.” After receiving this information, Belgium notified both France and England that they would come to its defense if they were invaded. Facing the prospects of invasion, the nation stood steadfastly determined to “repel by all the means in its power every attack upon its rights.”<sup>58</sup>

German forces proceeded headlong into Belgium during the first week of August. On Aug 6, 1914 troops crossed the frontier near Dolhain and by late afternoon had reached the forts surrounding Liège. Two days later, the Belgian government received a telegram begging King Albert to spare the nation from the further horrors of war. In the telegram, Germany again gave solemn assurance that it was not its intention to appropriate Belgian territory to itself and that an intervention of that nature was far from its thoughts. The concluding portion of the message \ declared that the Germans remained ready to evacuate Belgium as soon as the state of war will allow it to do so.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Whitlock, Brand. *Belgium: A Personal Narrative (Volumes I and II)*. (D. Appleton and Company New York, NY, 1920), p. 1:56. Impatient for a response the Germans did not wait for the official diplomatic response and had invaded Belgium at Visé earlier that day. Nevins, Allan. *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock (Volumes I and II)*. (New York and London: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1936), p. 2:4. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 56 and Gay, George I. and Fisher, H.H. *Public Relations of the Commission for the Relief of Belgium: Volumes I and II*. (Stanford University, CA: Stanford University Press, 1929), p. 1:1.

<sup>59</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:23 and Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:90. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:23 and Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:90.

The Belgian government was not swayed by Germany's second appeal for acquiescence. In a reply issued on Aug 12, the Belgians reiterated its original reply issued on August 3 stating that its neutrality was violated and that war was forced upon them. People across the nation responded to the invasion and outbreak of war in different ways. Removed from the immediate frontlines of the conflict, Brussels thrilled with the emotions of patriotic fervor and excitement. By Wednesday, Aug 19, the mood was sobered. German troops were advancing on city with only the *Garde Civique* to defend it. Four days later the city had fallen.<sup>60</sup>

Seeking refuge elsewhere, the Belgian government retired to Antwerp—the Germans next major objective. Initially, the main thrust of the German attack missed Antwerp in its sweep southward to Paris. In the attack the city was spared the wrath of the Germans until the deadlock on the Marne and the Aisne led to the so-called “race to the sea.” Strategic control of the Belgian coastline (with Antwerp as the key position) prompted the Kaiser to issue orders for its capture on September 9. Delays in bring huge siege guns to bombard the city's defenses allowed Belgian resistance to gain confidence until its ultimate failure in the first week of October, 1914.<sup>61</sup>

Order within the city devolved quickly once Antwerp began to fall. By October 7, there was almost no order and no direction inside the city while the Belgian military headquarters was in a state of disarray as well. A British major reported that it was practically impossible to hold the Belgian trenches. Whole companies of Belgian infantry and cavalry proceeded westward as night began to fall on October 7. Troops were being drawn off from the forts surrounding the

<sup>60</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:92. Loc cit, p. 1:72. Loc cit, p. 1:120. The barbarism of German forces became immediately recognizable during the initial occupation of Brussels. Upon entering the city, German soldiers separated men from the women and children, ranged them in line, and from time to time selected a few individuals who were led out and shot. The terrorization lasted throughout the day and night. Women and children were forced to stand by and witness the murder of husbands or fathers. According to Ambassador Brand Whitlock, the soldiers “stood by laughing” while the executions took place.

<sup>61</sup> Cahalan, Peter. *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*. (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1982), p. 89. Loc cit, p. 89-90.

city; the officers called it “making a change of base.” Over the next few days German forces methodically pounded the city of Antwerp. Finally, at noon on October 9 the shelling stopped and German troops entered the city. Over a span of approximately thirty-six hours, one hundred and eighty-one houses were destroyed by incendiaries, thirty-one houses were partially burned, nine houses totally destroyed, and five hundred and fifty-six badly damaged.<sup>62</sup>

Throughout the country stories of atrocities and violence followed the path of German advance. As German forces seized the city of Louvain on August 15, occupying soldiers claimed that they were being fired upon by local citizenry from the upper windows of houses in the Rue de la Station. In response the Germans began firing on the homes of civilians during the evening of August 25. For the remainder of the night soldiers beat in doors, turned people into the streets, shot them down, and set fire to the houses. In total, for two days the Germans looted, murdered, sacked, pillaged, and burned the city. At nine o’clock on August 27, an order was issued for all inhabitants to leave Louvain at once before bombardment was to begin. Soldiers again entered and cleared homes, refusing to allow inhabitants to take anything with them.<sup>63</sup>

The events at Louvain gained notoriety as far away as the United States as word of German deeds spread. The *New York Times* reported on September 12 that in actuality the

<sup>62</sup> Hunt, Edward Eyre. *War Bread: A Personal Narrative of the War and Relief in Belgium*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1916), p. 80. Loc cit, p. 82. Loc cit, p. 83. Loc cit, p. 83-84. Loc cit, p. 84. Loc cit, p. 104. Loc cit, p. 111.

<sup>63</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:177. In part the attack was prompted by the cry of Dr. Georg Berghausen that “the blood of the entire population of Louvain is not worth a drop of the blood of one German soldier.” Loc cit, p. 1:166 and Loc cit, p. 1:169-170. Ambassador Whitlock remarked that a “mad, blind, demonic rage seemed to have laid hold of the Germans, and they went through the streets killing, slaying, burning, looting, torturing and massacring; and for three terrible days the awful tragedy was enacted with such scenes as appall the imagination.” Loc cit, p. 1:166. The following morning German military officials calmly explained the situation to Belgian diplomats. According to von Lüttwitz General, the German commander at the city was talking with the Burgomaster when his son shot the officer and the population began firing on the troops. Whitlock maintained that Lüttwitz acted on false information and pretenses. Considering that the Burgomaster had no son and that no German general or other officer was murdered, it appeared that the vicious attack at Louvain was indeed unprovoked. Loc cit, p. 1:151. The story of a general being shot by the son of a Burgomaster was in actuality part of an account of an unfortunate incident occurring in Aerschot in August 19, where the fifteen-year-old son of the Burgomaster was executed by firing squad—not because he shot the general, but because a German colonel was killed; most likely by Belgian soldiers retreating through the city. Loc cit, p. 1:179. Loc cit, p. 1:173.

burning of Louvain constituted only one of the charges of atrocity against the Germans. In its aftermath the Germans launched an investigation, finding that incident was the fault of Belgian *francs-tireurs*. In a sworn deposition, Dr. Georg Berghausen declared it “undeniable that on the night from the twenty-fifth to the twenty-sixth of August, inhabitants of Louvain shot on numerous occasions on the German soldiers, and this without pretext, without a shot having been first fired by an officer or soldier.” No Belgians or neutrals were allowed to follow the progress of the hearings.<sup>64</sup>

By October 1914, evidence began piling up regarding German atrocities in Belgium. Using 1,200 depositions as evidence, Viscount Bryce issued a report on behalf of the British Government finding that in many parts of Belgium a series of “deliberate and systematically organized massacres” accompanied “many isolated murders and other outrages.” The report also concluded that the looting, burning, and wanton destruction of property were ordered and countenanced by the officers of the German army and that in the conduct of war innocent civilians were murdered in large numbers. The British believed that generally the burning and destruction were of no military necessity—it was part of a system of general terrorization.<sup>65</sup>

While German attempt to destroy the Allied forces and to occupy the English Channel ports of continental Europe during the first few weeks of the war failed, they succeeded in occupying practically all of Belgium and a large portion of Northern France. In Brussels, the Germans were to have passed through in three days. By mid-September German troops had been there for more three weeks, exhibiting tremendous influence over the local government and making themselves quite at home in those surroundings. Residents attempted to maintain a

<sup>64</sup> *New York Times*, Sep 12, 1914, p. 3. Other accounts included a report that German infantryman killed a Belgian officer and that captives were murdered without provocation. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:188. Loc cit, p. 1:196.

<sup>65</sup> *New York Times*, Oct 20, 1914, p. 40.

modicum of their normal pre-war daily lives as occupation became a permanent feature of city life. In Antwerp the situation was seemingly worse however. By the second week of October was reported that much of the city's population was fleeing. Reports of Newspaper correspondents still residing in the city described Antwerp as a spectacle of pity and terror.<sup>66</sup>

Devastation and mass exodus were common sights across Belgium. Across the country the German actions evolved from mandates and prohibitions into outright requisitioning and theft. In Antwerp, General von Beseler reported to Kaiser Wilhelm that an enormous "war booty" seized from the city including 500 cannons and large quantities of ammunition along with 4,000,000 kilograms of wheat and the large quantities of flour, coal, and flax wool valued at an estimated 10,000,000 marks. Edward Eyre Hunt succinctly summarized what he observed as commonplace amongst the soldiers. As they occupied town after town, province after province, they quartered soldiers upon Belgians whom hastily consumed what little food was available. He added that in many cases the native goods were confiscated while in other cases payment was promised at a convenient time in the future.<sup>67</sup>

By the end of October 1914, German requisitions of non war materiel directly impacted the health and safety of Belgians. In a joint statement the cities of Namur and Liège proclaimed that they had "rudely suffered" at the hands of the Germans. The press release also made mention of a problem that was beginning to demand an increasing share of attention after stories of atrocities in the first days of occupation fell from the front pages of Western newspapers: famine. "The German armies since the beginning of the invasion have lived on our soil by requisitioning victuals of all nature," explained Deputies Joseph Botogne and A. Jourense, "At

<sup>66</sup> Surface, Frank Macy and Bland, Raymond L. *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*. (Stanford University, CA: Stanford University Press, 1931), p. 12. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:241. Estimate cited that upwards of 250,000 people were in exodus from the city. Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 92.

<sup>67</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 179-180. Loc cit, p. 179. Loc cit, p. 180.

the moment of writing we have hardly grain enough for a few days.” This same situation would come to dominate the nature of relief and bring into sharp focus the threat of starvation that Belgium and Northern France constantly faced over the following four years.<sup>68</sup>

Requisitions and confiscations of food supplies by the Germans were not the only problems facing Belgium. In addition to requisitions the actions of belligerents placed the Belgians in a dangerous situation regarding food supplies. On one side, the Germans were preoccupied with securing sufficient foodstuffs for their own people and armies. On the other, the Allies steadfastly maintained their naval blockade of the Central Powers that prohibited the passage of food supplies into Belgium that might make its way into the mouths of the enemy. All the while frantic cries for help from Belgian communes echoed out to anyone who would listen.<sup>69</sup>

### **Initial German Guarantees Regarding Belgium**

The Germans issued guarantees regarding Belgium almost immediately after occupation began. These guarantees played an ever-increasing role in the relations between the German military, the Belgian government and its people, and relief programs that were beginning to take shape. Serving as the first Governor-General in Belgium, General von der Goltz was from the beginning inclined to adopt a policy of conciliation towards the Belgians. On September 2, he declared that no Belgian would ever be required to do anything “repugnant to his patriotic instincts.” Localized promises were also made by other German generals across Belgium; many of which went unfulfilled. Before taking Liège, General von Emmich for example gave formal

<sup>68</sup> *New York Times*, Nov 7, 1914, p. 5.

<sup>69</sup> Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. 12. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 180. The Belgians first appealed to the Germans, who in certain cases shared their army rations with the people. In the grand scheme, Edward Eyre Hunt found this process unsystematic and utterly useless as far as seven million Belgians were concerned. Appeals to Holland were also unsuccessful. The Dutch were eating war bread and anxiously hoarding every bit of food they possessed as they were as yet unable to import enough foodstuffs for their own use. Loc cit, p. 180-181.

guarantee to the city that it would not suffer the horrors of war by promising to pay for food taken from the people. He further proclaimed that “our soldiers will show themselves to be the best friends of the people from whom we entertain with the highest esteem, (and) the greatest sympathy.”<sup>70</sup>

Guarantees regarding food accompanied policies of conduct. On October 1, the Belgian Minister in London and the American Consul General at Antwerp were informed that German military authorities had given assurances in writing that any food supplies purchased by relief organizations would be reserved for the feeding of the civil population, free from requisitioning. News accompanying this message reported that food supplies in Brussels as practically exhausted. The cable concluded, “Immediate action is imperative.” Diplomatic representatives in Belgium discussed the food conditions and who was responsible for its remedy. These individuals reminded the Germans that under the provisions of the Hague Convention they were required to feed the Belgians. Looking at the situation realistically, Ambassador Whitlock commented that the Hague Conventions were all they could offer the civil population—and the people could not eat them.<sup>71</sup>

The necessity for action became increasingly clear as conditions worsened. By mid-October, the issue of food supplies was applicable to not only Brussels but to the entire population in Belgium. Baron von der Lancken stood poised to offer guarantees on behalf of the German government that relief supplies of food would go directly to the Belgian populace. Armed with the prospects of relieving hungry Belgians, the Comité Central de Secours et d’

<sup>70</sup> Kittredge, Tracy Barrett. *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium: 1914-1917*. (London: Crowther and Goodman, Ltd., 1920), p. 28. Von der Goltz tenure in Belgium was only short lived. In November 1914, he was sent to Constantinople and replaced by General von Bissing. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:392. Von Bissing served as German Governor-General until his death in April 1917. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 28. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 179.

<sup>71</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:6 and 7. Loc cit, p. 1:7. Loc cit, p. 1:342.



Alimentation took action. On October 16, Baron von der Goltz gave official assurances to the Comité Central in the form of promises that provision were exclusively for the civil population, that the foodstuffs would hereafter be exempt from requisitioning by the military, and that these stocks were the property of the Committee. Eleven days later, word of German promises and of American action appeared in Western newspapers.<sup>72</sup>

The issue of German complicity in the importation of relief was contentious. A second series of assurances regarding relief were released via the German Foreign Office in November 1914, explaining that the Imperial Government consented willingly to the importation of foodstuffs but reserved the right to revoke this consent should it become necessary. Included in this statement was the order that relief supplies were to be sent to Belgium through Dutch ports exclusively. Chafing at the conditions of hunger, Whitlock complained that the Germans had done nothing to get food to the Belgians. “The best that can be said,” Whitlock continued, “is that they have put no obstacle in the way of Americans buying food and shipping it here.” A month later, the new Governor-General in Belgium, General von Bissing, reiterated his assurances that food would not be requisitioned.<sup>73</sup>

### **The Nation of Belgium and the Immediacy of the Problem**

The highly industrialized nature of the Belgian economy and its heavy dependence on the importation of foodstuffs made the country particularly vulnerable once the war began. With an area of 11,373 miles and a population of nearly 8, 000,000 its population density was

<sup>72</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:343. Loc cit, p. 1:343-344. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:10-11. An article entitled *Famine Stricken Charleroi* appeared in the British paper the *Daily Chronicle* on Oct 27, 1914, stating that assurances were given to neutral powers that they would not be interfered with. That same day an article entitled *Americans to Rush Food to Belgium* appeared in the *New York Times*, reporting that Captain C.F. Lucey received 130 cards stamped with German government authorizations to allow food to be sent to the American Minister at Brussels (Brand Whitlock) without interference. *New York Times*, Oct 28, 1914, p. 3.

<sup>73</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:307. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:64. Loc cit, p. 2:82.

approximately 700 people per square mile before the outbreak of war. In normal times, Belgium imported nearly 80 percent of its breadstuffs. Looked at from a different perspective, Belgium produced only about one-sixth of the food its people consumed annually. Its agricultural production afforded sustenance to the population for only four months out of the year and it never had enough reserves on hand to keep the population alive for more than two months. As a nation of bread-eaters, the cereal industries of Belgium normally produced only one-fourth of its annual consumption as it was. "Bread," reported the *New York Times*, "is not only the staff of life; it is the legs (of Belgium)." Any peaceable interruption of overseas and overland commerce would bring famine conditions to the Belgians. Invasion made the prospect of starvation all the more likely.<sup>74</sup>

The timing of war and the invasion of Belgium contributed substantially to its suddenly emerging problem of food supplies. The harvest was being gathered just as war broke out in the countryside. Ripened crops were left standing in the fields where they were either trampled by marching soldiers or were left to rot as people fled. In addition, a substantial supply of grain was left un-harvested in the fields of Belgium during the confusion and panic of the first days of war.<sup>75</sup>

The economy of Belgian also contributed to its difficulties once war began. Among industrialized nations, Belgium was unique in possessing a permanent mass of floating laborers. The head of household often migrated from place to place during the summer months while

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<sup>74</sup> Combined the highly industrialized sectors of Belgium and Northern France depended on imports for 70 percent of their food, practically all of their textiles and clothing, and most of their other raw materials before the war began. Hoover, Herbert. *An American Epic, Volumes I and III*. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1959 and 1961), p. 1:xxi. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 8 and Kellogg, Vernon. *Fighting Starvation in Belgium*. (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1918), p. 1-5. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 175. Kellogg, Vernon. *Herbert Hoover As His Friends See Him*. (Washington, DC: Republican National Committee, 1928), p. 7. Kellogg, *Fighting Starvation in Belgium*, p. 1-5. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 175 and Kellogg, *Herbert Hoover As His Friends See Him*, p. 7-8. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 8. *New York Times*, Feb 12, 1915, p. 3. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 175.

<sup>75</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 176. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:117.

women and children tended to a tiny agricultural holding. In total, 1,204,810 people worked as agricultural laborers in Belgium before the outbreak of war. Invasion brought a sudden shock to the entire working Belgian population. August 7, 1914 found practically every man, woman, and child in every village, town, and city suddenly idle, without work, and without food. American James Harder reported that the first requisitions squeezed Belgium dry. “Its industrial riches were very great,” Harder commented, “but for that reason (it) did not produce much; (Belgium) was a factory hand, buying (its) bread instead of baking it. All the Belgian industries stopped at once.”<sup>76</sup>

While the shock of war affected the economies of all combatants its impact on Belgium was acute. The sudden disruption of world trade in August 1914 staggered every industrialized nation in the world. In each case there came a gradual readjustment to new conditions after a painful period of unemployment and financial distress with one exception—Belgium. As potentially the most industrialized nation in the world in 1914 (with the possible exception of Britain) it was the European nation most dependent on access to raw materials and markets for survival. An April 1917 report released by the CRB explained the domino effect that caused destitution in Belgium. As an aggregate the destruction of property, the loss of breadwinners, and the paralysis of industry and the consequent unemployment not only contributed to the crisis of food amongst Belgians it also created a situation where many of them could not afford to pay for foodstuffs if they were imported. The hardest hit by the economic dislodging of Belgium were the middle classes—those in trades, official positions, or small businesses.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 177. Loc cit, p. 178. Loc cit, p. 176. Beyond farm work, 49 percent of the Belgian population were salaried and wage earners and dependent on the normal functioning of industry. Loc cit, p. 176. Loc cit, p. 176-177. Taillandier, Madame Saint-Rene. *The Soul of the “CRB” A French View of the Hoover Relief Work*. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1919), p. 47.

<sup>77</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:2. Loc cit, p. 2:315. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 9.

The disruption of trade swept away the superstructure of Belgian civil society making the situation critical almost overnight. In 1917, CRB representative Francis Cogswell Wickes recalled how, without warning, and in what seemed to be a day, Belgium was reduced to a “primitive and almost medieval state” by the Germans. Despite the growing difficulties the communes maintained some semblance of order and control across Belgium however. Communal authorities alone continued assert a degree of independence and exercised a limited number of their functions. In retrospect, Wickes believed they provided a rallying point for the gradual awakening of the population. Although the commune structure survived, the threat remained pervasively real. Hope for the moment was gone; there was nothing that the people could turn to and nothing to protect them.<sup>78</sup>

Existing stocks of food disappeared as fast as industry in Belgium. Within the first weeks of war they had been depleted either by destruction or requisition. Driven by the fear of shortage, hoarding and speculation by segments of the population that preyed on the misfortunes of others led to further difficulties. Compounding the issue and fueling these rumors was the Allied blockade of Germany that cut off food imports and exports of industrial goods. Transatlantic traffic remained virtually suspended in the weeks following the outbreak of war. By September 1914, the Allied blockade was working. It seemed however that the first suffer would not be Germany, but Belgium instead.<sup>79</sup>

Specific parts of Belgium suffered more than others in the fall of 1914. Those living near the front faced the worst situations. Villages in these districts were overrun by thousands of passing troops going to and from the trenches. Absolute martial law without mitigation prevailed in these regions. German soldiers took what they wanted, remaking villages according

<sup>78</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:481.

<sup>79</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 7. Loc cit, p. 8. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 175. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 25-26.

to their whims. Luxembourg suffered disproportionately to other locations. Its 230,000 residents lived in scattered communities in the Ardennes region. Entire villages were practically erased from existence in the southern and western parts of the province following invasion. Communal authorities assumed the problem of sheltering, feeding, and clothing practically the entire of the remaining population. Such a task was beyond the means of what could be done locally.<sup>80</sup>

### **The First Organization of Charity**

The communes remained a small glimmer of hope in relieving desperate Belgians despite the staunch challenges before them. The whole machinery of the Belgian central government was broken down and swept away by the invader. Provincial administrations were likewise superseded or outright controlled by German provincial governors making any initiative on their behalf virtually impossible. Only the communal administrations survived mostly intact. They alone possessed the liberty of action to deal with the crisis brought about by food shortages and destitution.<sup>81</sup>

Assistance from the communes could not come soon enough. In Brussels the situation was growing more desperate by the hour. On August 22, the Burgomaster of the city announced that there was no food, no forage for horses, and no money left in the banks. By the end of the month it was practically impossible to purchase more than a pound of flour or sugar. Already in short supply, canned goods were bought by anxious people who besieged shops hoping to get hold of a private cache before they were gone. Even at the American Legation there was only grey bread to be found. It was later reported that if not for the initial supply of food secured by a small contingent of Americans, Brussels would have been out of food by the end of September.

<sup>80</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 31. Loc cit, p. 19.

<sup>81</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 10.

Nevertheless, on October 1 Hugh Gibson reported to the Belgian Minister in London that there was practically no flour nor salt in Brussels. Foreshadowing a grave future on the prospects of the present, Gibson worried that “anything approaching a famine will lead to grave disorders the consequences of which cannot now be foreseen.”<sup>82</sup>

The food situation in Belgium grew increasingly grim in October 1914. Delegates from the Hainaut informed the Belgian minister at The Hague on October 4 that only a few days of provisions remained. The Hainaut was struggling to assist the nearly 900,000 destitute in the region, offering only a half-ration to most citizens. Refugees who fled the communes fared little better in their Dutch surroundings. The bread supply had been exhausted for days before Edward Eyre Hunt arrived in Hulst. Nearby, a village swelled from one thousand locals to a new population including some 23,000 Belgians. Revictualing through Belgian efforts alone proved problematic. Hunger fed the threat of other problems ancillary to the strife. By mid-October it was feared that desperation would lead to revolt by a stubborn and starving population. Inevitably such revolts would be met by the savage repression of German bayonets and machine guns.<sup>83</sup>

Diplomats still stationed in Belgium began spreading word about the situation in hopes of securing assistance—before it was too late. On October 16, Ambassador Whitlock sent telegrams to both Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan and President Woodrow Wilson. Whitlock cut straight to the point in his cable to Bryan: “Within two weeks there will be no more food in Belgium.” He also explained to the secretary of state that relief needed to be extended to

<sup>82</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:141. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 11. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:341. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 15. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:7.

<sup>83</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 42. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:50. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 26. The *New York Times* ran an article fearing the same prospects of hunger leading to attacks on German authorities in Belgium, causing a serious loss of life. *New York Times*, Oct 30, 1914, p. 3.

the entire country as winter approached. Whitlock's words to the President were similar: "In two weeks the civil population of Belgium, already in misery, will face starvation." In his opinion local efforts centered in Brussels and Antwerp needed to be extended to the greater population of Belgium under the patronage of the Marquis de Villalobar and himself.<sup>84</sup>

The proposition made by Whitlock appeared to be the only solution for the time being. On October 24, the Belgian Committee (the Comité Central) reported that Brussels possessed sufficient food supplies for approximately ten days. Foodstuffs in Charleroi and Liège by contrast were practically exhausted. Meanwhile the British press watched the unfolding events closely. Two days later on October 26, the Burgomaster and Alderman of Charleroi warned that their people were now on the point of starvation. Starvation en mass could not be staved off forever despite the limited successes of local relief efforts in the communes. Belgian Emile Francqui reported that there were only a few thousand sacks of wheat left in the entire country; after that there was nothing. His recommendation was that only relief spearheaded by an external organization could save Belgium. Ernest Solvay agreed. In a meeting of the Comité Central on October 29 he admitted that Belgium was on the verge of famine.<sup>85</sup>

A massive relief effort would be needed most urgently to avert a famine. In early November, King Albert of Belgium's cry for help reverberated in both Britain and the United States. According to King Albert, "Despite all that can be done, the suffering in the coming winter will be terrible, but the burden we must bear will be lightened if my people can be spared the pangs of hunger with its frightful consequences of disease and violence." "It is not money, but food that is needed," the King continued, "and if means can be formed to call the attention of

<sup>84</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:11. Loc cit, p. 1:12. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:54.

<sup>85</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, Oct 24, 1914. *Daily Call*, Oct 26, 1914. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:32. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 76.

our people at home to the plight of the poor Belgians, I am sure they will send succor and relief for the winter that is drawing near.” Assistance could not come soon enough; by November 1 an estimated 1,200,000 Belgians were destitute. For its part the Belgian government advanced one million pounds as working capital and for transportation.<sup>86</sup>

The *New York Times* monitored events in Belgium closely in the weeks following King Albert’s appeal. Sobering facts regarding Belgian relief necessity filled the pages of the *New York Times* alongside cries for help which in many cases bringing to life the sheer magnitude of the problem. Belgian Consul General Pierre Mali in an article appearing in late November reported that the nation’s consumption of flour in normal times was between 40,000 and 4,500 220-pound bags of flour a day. Explained differently, Belgium needed 4,000 tons or one shipload of flour every day. At that point the various relief organizations could only ship one shipload of flour per week—one-seventh of the daily requirement.<sup>87</sup>

News regarding the plight of Belgium only worsened in December 1914. The *Newcastle Daily Journal* reported on December 12 that they were on the eve of seeing the population of Belgium plunged into one of the “blackest famine.” Less than two weeks later the holiday of Christmas brought little cheer, especially among the laboring classes. By this point the slender resources of the unemployed were exhausted, forcing them to become totally dependent on charitable aid for their support. Without assistance the unemployed faced the alternatives of starving or accepting work from the Germans. In many areas desperation drove the unemployed and destitute to the brink. Several cases of persons breaking into the houses of rich Belgians who fled to England were reported. In the face of lawlessness and the prospects of rioting, W.W.

<sup>86</sup> *New York Times*, Nov 1, 1914, p. 6. *Liverpool Daily*, Nov 3, 1914, *Daily News and Leader*, Nov 3, 1914, and *Daily Graphic*, Nov 3, 1914, Nash, George H. *The Life of Herbert Hoover (Volumes I, II, and III)*. (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1983 and 1988), p. 2:36. *Daily Telegraph*, Nov 3, 1914. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 9. Loc cit, p. 76.

<sup>87</sup> *New York Times*, Nov 25, 1914, p. 4.



Stratton (an Oxford Rhodes Scholar volunteering in Brussels) reported that the incidents had no serious consequences largely owing to the good temper of the German commanders. Stratton offered a caveat in that the situation could change quickly. He commented that, “if this sort of thing continues—and it may be more or less expected as long as there is hunger—there is no knowing what may be the result. It might be terrible.”<sup>88</sup>

Reports of potential rioting and civil unrest were not a product of the holidays exclusively. Captain C.F. Lucey reported nearly two months earlier that there was great danger of revolution, especially near Liège. It appeared the boiling point had been reached according to Lucey: “The people are so hungry and so desperate that the sight of every German incites them, and in their desperate frame of mind, seeing their children and families without food or clothes, they are liable to attack the German soldiers at any moment, which would mean another terrible and useless sacrifice of the Belgian people.” The chill of winter exacerbated tensions, especially in regards to clothing. Edward Eyre Hunt observed that for three months children in Willehroeck were absent from school literally because they had no clothes to go in. In every household the brightest was chosen to wear what clothes were available. It was common place to see little boys in their sisters’ dresses and little girls in boy’s clothes.<sup>89</sup>

Unbeknownst to the general public a cadre of Belgian organizations began providing relief as soon as the war began. As early as August 5, Ambassador Whitlock commented that the government of Belgium was making requisitions of food stuffs and preparing measures for aiding the families of soldiers. Within five days of the commencement of fighting a royal decree was issued providing action to meet the crisis. On August 14, the specifics of this law were set

<sup>88</sup> *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, Dec 12, 1914. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:31. *Birmingham Gazette*, Dec 22, 1914 and *Morning Post*, Dec 22, 1914.

<sup>89</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:30. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 301.

by the provincial governors (the Burgomasters) fixing maximum prices for the chief articles of food and requisitioning stocks of those items in order to provision the population.<sup>90</sup>

In the interim the communes stepped up almost immediately to meet the needs of Belgians. Early volunteer efforts in Louvain were among the most remarkable for the results they obtained in the face of German occupation. On August 26, a group of leading citizens came together and organized a *Comité de Notables* (Committee of Notables). The Comité was better equipped to solve their localized problems precisely because a considerable stock of wheat and flour prepared in the mills near the city were turned over directly to the committee for the needs of the population.<sup>91</sup>

Meanwhile, the vacuum of power at the national level created by the departure of the King, Cabinet, and Parliament left only the Belgian Permanent Deputation—an executive committee of the provincial councils—between the invaders and the people. German military decree quickly assumed the presidency of the nine Permanent Deputations and in the process resurrected the structure of the Belgian civil government under their control however. Although their powers were diminished, the communal authorities were not left without recourse and the ability to act on behalf of the Belgian populace. Possessing a limited supply of foodstuffs Belgians appealed to Brussels, sending purchasing agents with dog-carts to buy what little flour and potato they could in the open market. As the capital of Belgium this gravitation towards Brussels was not unusual. What was unique, and what gave Brussels an advantage over other communes, was a volunteer relief organization that served the city. Named *le Comité Central de Secours et d' Alimentation pour l' Agglomération bruxelloise* ( the Central Relief Committee),

<sup>90</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:13. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 10.

<sup>91</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 23.

the organization was formed on September 5 under the patronage of the American Minister Brand Whitlock and the Spanish Minister Marquis de Villalobar with Earnest Solvay as its president.<sup>92</sup>

The Comité Central immediately took action once it was formed. Working in conjunction with Spanish and American Ministers a number of prominent citizens in Brussels realized that the supply of food within the city would soon become exhausted and organized the city's sixteen communes. With little food to be found throughout Belgium, the committee resolved to make an effort to import supplies. After a series of short negotiations the approval of the project was secured with the German Military Governor along with a promise that imported food would be immune from requisitions. In conjunction with the creation of the Comité a system of food distribution via soup kitchens was also created by Burgomaster (Mayor) Max of Brussels.<sup>93</sup>

Acting in a similar manner, the city of Antwerp created two commissions of its own; one for ravitaillement and the other for assistance. These two committees survived the initial German onslaught to become the nucleus of the provincial group later reorganized to work in concert with the Comité National. Existing as a group representing all classes and all interests, the Antwerp Relief Committee faced challenges that were difficult to overcome—the issue of control especially. During a brief period of readjustment and conflict with organizers the role of American volunteers was to for independence from the political influence of the Germans and for administrative unity from the Belgians.<sup>94</sup>

Internal conflict combined with the exigencies of occupation to create a perplexing situation for the Antwerp Relief Committee and its American representatives to deal with. At the

<sup>92</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 173. Loc cit, p. 181 and Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 12.

<sup>93</sup> Kittredge, Tracy Barrett. "Californians with Hoover in Europe." *The California Alumni Fortnightly*, Vol. 13, No. 1-10. (Alumni Association of the University of California, Berkeley, CA, Jan-Jun 1920), 2:39. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 12.

<sup>94</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 25. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 247.

heart of conflict was the belief among officials in Antwerp that relief was a municipal matter. With a spirit of patriotism they shared with neighboring communes what food and money they municipally controlled and saw no reason why they should not take credit for the generosity or why they should surrender their position at the center of supplies when food began to arrive from America. Despite these reservations it became clear that unity of action was needed in order prevent starvation.<sup>95</sup>

By the latter part of September the Comité Central in Brussels and the volunteer committees of Liège, Charleroi, and Namur realized that famine was but a few weeks off. In the following weeks the challenges the communes faced became increasingly complicated as they continued to function as individual units under a loose confederation of relief organizations. With normal supplies of foodstuffs greatly influenced by requisition and destruction the volunteer committees had to find ways of providing food for not only the destitute but for entire populations. When the situation became critical many Belgians combined initiative, energy, and patriotic devotion to avert famine. In this process they came to the realization that unless assistance could come from the outside world their efforts, sacrifice, and devotion would be all for naught.<sup>96</sup>

The embedding of relief efforts within the commune system of Belgium was a critical component of ravitaillement that contributed greatly to its success throughout the war. Shortly after communal-based relief efforts began that “it was a fortunate circumstance that the organization was formed somewhat on the model of the Belgian government, the system of which is based on the commune, the cell of the whole organization.” The cornerstones of Belgium were its 2,633 communes which acted freely in governing local affairs. Whitlock noted

<sup>95</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 250. Loc cit, p. 250-251.

<sup>96</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:3. Kellogg, *Herbert Hoover As His Friends See Him*, p. 25.

that “there is not a square inch of soil in Belgium that does not belong to a commune, not a citizen that does not form a part of a little city of community, and this whether it is in the country or in the town, though, of course, in a country so densely populated every commune has a village as a nucleus.” Edward Eyre Hunt added that while the Belgian state did not come into existence until the 1830s, the commune had been “in existence from time immemorial. It had survived under an almost endless trampling of foreign armies. The commune, not the nation, was the Belgian fatherland.”<sup>97</sup>

Despite their noted resiliency the communes faced new problems that put them to the test like never before. Four problems that emerged proved to be particularly problematic, they included: (1) the reestablishment of order and credit abroad; (2) the right to transport foodstuffs through the British blockade into territory occupied by the Germans; (3) the right to Belgian transportation facilities for such imports and (4) the securing of guarantees that the Germans would leave relief imports alone. Recognizing these concerns, a preliminary meeting was held on September 1 to set the machinery of the Comité National de Secours et d’ Alimentation in motion. At the meeting it was agreed that a strong private body, possessing the neutral character necessary to engender confidence in local officials, German authorities, and neutral powers with sufficient public prestige and credit to carry on large operations was needed.<sup>98</sup>

The Comité Central/National began working on the specifics of its system after organizing officially on September 5 under the presidency of Ernest Solvay. A central component of this planning involved the arrangement for a central warehouse and the appointment of a special subcommittee under the direction of Daniel Heinemann and other Americans to take charge of securing food. At the time, the Comité planned to provide

<sup>97</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:344. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 243.

<sup>98</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 181-182. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 13.

temporary relief to the destitute of Greater Brussels and its neighbors in Louvain only. Meanwhile, numerous committees appeared in the various centers of Belgium, each engaged in relief work but acting independently and in competition with each other with the intent of solving local cases regardless of national emergencies. It was not until late October or early November 1914 that the possibility of general famine across the country and a means to remedy it became a primary directive for the Comité Central/National.<sup>99</sup>

Domestic Belgian relief organizations presaged the work of ravitaillement that eventually fell under the management of Americans. CRB officials admitted after their work began that even before the war a well organized system of charitable relief existed throughout Belgium. Edward Eyre Hunt observed that in every village there was a *Bureau de Bienfaisance* that in many cases this organization was accompanied by a Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and a *Comité de Secours*. Larger cities possessed branches of the Red Cross with committees of charity, reduced price restaurants, committees for the children of soldiers, support for nursing mothers, and a variety of other relief organizations handled primarily under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>100</sup>

Preexisting relief structures in Belgium were forced to adapt once the war commenced. Immediately the system was taxed in a way it had never been before. The relief of Belgium was not a matter of pouring a stream of supplies for a large number of people suddenly destitute, as is the case when a region is devastated by an earthquake; it was a problem of provisioning a highly industrialized, densely populated population suddenly cut off from the external markets generated its revenues and provided 80 percent of the cereals it consumed. Belgians quickly responded in earnest to assist fellow Belgians. Six organizations emerged dealing with relief in

<sup>99</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 13. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:14. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 14.

<sup>100</sup> Taillandier, *The Soul of the "CRB,"* p. 102. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 181.

occupied Belgium; ten looked after the wounded and convalescent Belgian soldiers, both in Britain and at the front; and nineteen dealt with clothing, food, rest, and recreation for Belgian soldiers at the front or on leave in England.<sup>101</sup>

American participation in relief began immediately after Belgium was pulled into the fray. In early August a committee of Americans residing in Brussels was formed under the patronage of Brand Whitlock to aid Americans caught in Europe and to assist the Legation and Consulate in organizing the American colony within the city. Committee membership included several prominent Americans in the business and financial life of Brussels—Daniel Heineman, his associate William Hulse, and mining engineer Millard K. Shaler. These men would serve as the connecting link between Belgian structure and American strategy that defined relief work during the war.<sup>102</sup>

The challenges before Whitlock in particular were tremendous as the events of August and September 1914 unfolded. Edward Eyre Hunt commented that Whitlock was the sole representative of the only great neutral power left in the world in Brussels and by his position was at the very center of the cyclone. Waves of refugees, many of them destitute, all of them in a state of abject panic and demoralization flooded into Brussels as the Germans advanced. Without decisive and quick action these refugees would either starve by the roadside or be driven by desperation into plundering. Diplomacy, Whitlock's primary job in Belgium before the outbreak of war, was equally problematic. Relations between the Belgians and the Germans were tenuous at best after the outbreak of war. Reporting for the British press, Arno Bosch warned that slightest misunderstanding might upset everything. "The relations between the Germans and Belgians are strained and dangerous," Bosch continued, "In Brussels I felt as if I

<sup>101</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:117. Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 453.

<sup>102</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 12.

were on the half-formed crust of a volcano. A single hasty action by an American might bring disaster.”<sup>103</sup>

During the week of August 1-8, 1914 the American committee met for the first time in Brussels. At this conference the four men (Whitlock, Heineman, Shaler, and Hulse) discussed the means to relief fellow-Americans overwhelmed by the war. The results of their planning were the raising of funds and the renting of a house where Americans might seek shelter. They also made preliminary arrangements to assist Americans wishing to return to the states a safe way to Britain and then across the Atlantic. This effort also would soon be taken over by Herbert Hoover.<sup>104</sup>

American organizations in Brussels quickly became ad hoc institutions that Belgians turned to for assistance. Staffed by Secretary Hugh Gibson and clerk Alexander Cruger, the American Legation became the foundation head for all sorts of help and advice for both Brussels and greater Belgium. Edward Eyre Hunt believed that after August 20, the American Legation became the one stable point around which the demoralized population could rally. The Legation formed and supplied bread lines, opened soup kitchens, and created depots to distribute clothing. Beyond that, it served as a haven of refuge. Hunt recalled that American delegates in Brussels feared to think and could never speak out. The only place in Belgium where they could speak their mind and listen to opinion without the fear of spies and perform their diplomatic duties was at the American Legation. Visitors, including journalists, intermittently stopped by the American offices but invariably hurried across the border at the first opportunity. Legation

<sup>103</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 189. *Yorkshire Observer*, Dec 24, 1914.

<sup>104</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:77.



representatives laughed at them but understood. Belgium was, in the view of Hunt, “like a military prison and an asylum for the insane rolled into one.”<sup>105</sup>

Within Belgium the Comité Central was also working towards providing relief locally. In mid-September they asked American mining engineer Millard Shaler to proceed to Holland and England to purchase some 2,500 tons of flour, rice, beans, and peas to meet the immediate needs of Brussels soup kitchens. The trip was treacherous for Shaler. In Liège he was arrested and held for a day by the Germans before being allowed to enter Holland. Finding no food available from the Dutch he went on to England, arriving in London on September 27. Shaler found food in London, but encountered economic difficulties in securing the transaction. These difficulties made the organization of the Committee for Relief in Belgium necessary before any food could be sent back to Belgium.<sup>106</sup>

In carrying out his mission, Shaler made a connection that would change the character of Belgian relief permanently. Around the time he reached London, Shaler had contacted Edgar Rickard, an acquaintance and professional associate of his, explaining the situation of peril facing Belgium and the purpose of his trip. Promising to help if he could, Rickard took Shaler to an acquaintance of his. Rickard believed if any man could save Belgium it was this individual—one Herbert Clark Hoover.<sup>107</sup>

Food relief became the primary component of American involvement by the beginning of October 1914. Herbert Hoover commented upon his first study of the situation that although much relief work was already being done for the Belgian refugees but the circumstances for those remaining in the country were dire. Because of their neutral position, Hoover’s recommendation was that Americans might be able to render a great service by concentrating

<sup>105</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 190. Loc cit, p. 191. Loc cit, p. 263.

<sup>106</sup> Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 2:39.

<sup>107</sup> Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 2:39.

their relief efforts on a scheme to provide food for Belgians in Belgium. Secretary Hugh Gibson of the American Legation ventured to London on October 1 in an attempt to garner support. He brought with him stories of the increasing dangers of famine and Belgium along with letters from Brand Whitlock addressed to Ambassador Walter Hines Page urging American intervention.<sup>108</sup>

Action quickly resulted from discussions and meetings in Britain. Food began making its way to Belgium via Holland within weeks. By the end of October the *S.S. Coblenz* crossed the channel with a cargo of flour, beans, and peas. The voyage marked the beginning of a monumental effort. It was the first of 2,313 cargoes destined for Belgium which in total carried more than 5,000,000 tons of relief supplies during the next five years.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 38. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 2:39.

<sup>109</sup> Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. 12. Loc cit, p. 12-13.

### CHAPTER THREE: *Creating the “Improvised Machine”*

#### Refugee Assistance in Britain

As events began unfolding in the fall of 1914 the British were particularly in tune to the problems at hand in Belgium and proved ready and willing to assist. In the first days of war British-based relief efforts began with the appearance on August 5, 6, and 9 of the Committee on the Prevention and Relief of Distress, the National Relief Fund, and the War Emergency Workers' National Committee respectively. Rising food prices and unemployment seemingly justified the creation of British relief committees. On August 5, the Committee for the Prevention of Relief and Distress met for the first time; setting its purpose at advising on measures necessary to deal with distress arising in the consequence of war, and to initiate, advise, and coordinate action taken with a view to prevent and relieve distress. The following day the Committee issued an advertisement “inviting” local authorities to establish committees for the prevention of relief and distress. The committees were to be set up on “thoroughly representative lines” and should be comprised of local authorities, distress committees, and philanthropic bodies. August 6 also marked the beginning of the National Relief Fund. The quick emergence of charitable organizations revealed that private charity did not enter the war unprepared. This was clearly demonstrated by the ability of the National Relief Fund to raise large sums of money during its first week of existence.<sup>110</sup>

Both British and Belgian relief organizations were in need of organization. Belgian relief in particular was at first a big, ramshackle business with only the limits of public generosity being its primary factor determining the level of growth. An initial problem was that there were

<sup>110</sup> Sympathy for Belgium was at its height during the German invasion in August until early November 1914. Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 169. Guilt over being unable to militarily assist the Belgians appeared to be an early motivating factor in providing relief. The failure to come to Belgium's aid could only be repaid by the British citizenry through generosity to the nation's war victims. Loc cit, p. 217 and 218. Loc cit, p. 205-206. Loc cit, p. 206. Loc cit, p. 20. Loc cit, p. 20-21.

too many organizations pursuing the same ends. This issue would later be addressed by the CRB in its many statements that it was the official charity for the relief of Belgium. The root cause of charity duplication was determined as the ambitions and strong wills of individuals whom desired to captain independent agencies. Belgian charity loomed very large within the scheme of things in British society. By February 1916 the editor of the *Daily Chronicle* (Robert Donald) listed 69 Belgian relief charities in operation.<sup>111</sup>

Private philanthropy towards Belgium generally followed a similar structure as that offered by British relief commissions. In the fall of 1914 when many of these groups were being formed the British government announced that private charity would be the best mode for handling war relief. This view that the state should be seen and heard as little as possible in the treatment of most social problems was common throughout British society. In many cases both before and during experts claimed that volunteer helpers, not bureaucrats, were best suited in dealing with suffering. While philanthropists were generally conservative against the extension of state welfare in the case of Belgian relief they were at the same time prepared to countenance state intervention (or funding) where private efforts proved inadequate.<sup>112</sup>

War relief efforts were rooted in the British philanthropic philosophies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. At the center of British charitable forces was the Charity Organization Society (COS); an organization founded in 1869 to bring order from the chaos of London's numerous but uncoordinated charities. Initially the COS based its social program on the belief that poverty was the result of defects in character, not the social structure and the economic organization of Britain. In the changed social and political climate of early twentieth century England the arguments for equal treatment of citizens in need gained primacy over the

<sup>111</sup> Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 455. Loc cit, p. 452-453. At least another 24 charities had enjoyed a brief existence in 1914 or 1915. Loc cit, p. 453.

<sup>112</sup> Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 64. Loc cit, p. 449.

COS's discriminating moralism. Despite its shrinking authority, the COS was still an active and powerful force in 1914. One of its crucial contributions to early wartime relief organization was its dedication to scientific charity, espousing the believing that assistance must be based on the rigorous investigation of problems before taking action.<sup>113</sup>

Extensive experience informed British charities that the methods by which help was administered were crucial. Beyond the organizational implications of methods, the issue of moral consequence of aid for giver and receiver were also of critical importance. Because it produced new social problems, exacerbated old ones and diminished others, war wrought changes in the philanthropic community of Britain. Above all else the mushrooming growth of new charitable organizations brought into focus the problems that were traditionally endemic to philanthropy: overlapping effort, extravagance, and fraud. Overlapping and waste went hand and hand in charity. The slippery slope it created led from inefficiency and insensibility into fraudulent activity.<sup>114</sup>

British relief organizations would not have to wait long for a steady stream of Belgians to appear in England. Once in Britain their presence personalized the war for many British. Brits were shocked by German reprisals against Belgian citizens and enraged by the destruction of Louvain over a period of six days in late September and early October 1914. Naturally there was a sense of eagerness to receive confirmation of enemy barbarity from the lips of their victims. Reporters avidly questioned refugees at railway stations or transit camps for dramatic stories of murder, rapine, and pillage. Through extensive print coverage the population of Belgium was transplanted almost overnight from a nation despised or ignored by the British public before the war into a brave, heroic ally. Propagandist in both the public and private sectors painted a

<sup>113</sup> Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 297. Loc cit, p. 297-298. Loc cit, p. 327. Loc cit, p. 299. Loc cit, p. 300.

<sup>114</sup> Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 449. Loc cit, p. 451. Loc cit, p. 456.

picture of a stubborn, tenacious, conservative, thrifty, hardworking, and domestic Belgian nation. The coming of war forced the British government to prepare for the unthinkable—the invasion of England. Belgian refugees in the early days of World War I first brought Britain face to face with what invasion meant to the population.<sup>115</sup>

Importing refugees from Belgium to Britain was seen as a patriotic and humane duty. “We in England must throw out the life-lines, we must invite and select and transport, not merely receive, the exiles, “Sir Gilbert Parker exclaimed, “It is our clear duty to do so.” At the same time, bringing refugees to England appeared to be the least of several possible evils. The promise of the British government to allow food to be shipped to Belgium meant placing a strain on the shipping capacity of the Allies. Feeding refugees in England prevented complex entanglements with the Germans and Americans. Beyond any overt political implications the contingents of Belgian refugees were concrete reminders of the righteousness of the Allied cause. From the beginning of the war Britain’s one immutable and avowed promise was the complete restoration of Belgium to its pre-war boundaries. “Guests of the nation” in the early months of the war were symbols of British commitment and compassion for both propagandists and the thousands of hardworking men and women in local committees alike.<sup>116</sup>

Refugee relief began to normalize as 1914 ended and 1915 began. November witnessed a drastic decline in the number of new committees formed to deal with refugees. By the time the great wave of slowed to a trickle in 1915 some two thousand local committees in Britain were formed. The great majority of these groups began as spontaneous creations of local citizens.

<sup>115</sup> Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 112. Loc cit, p. 112-113. Loc cit, p. 186. Loc cit, p. 187. Loc cit, p. 117.

<sup>116</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, Dec 9, 1914. Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 125. Loc cit, p. 125-126. Loc cit, p. 126. Loc cit, p. 6. Loc cit, p. 217.

Most frequently an individual or a group of friends and neighbors began by offering to take in refugees and then enlisted the entire community to help.<sup>117</sup>

Once committees were in place the aid provided to Belgian refugees fell into several different categories. At an elementary level it entailed the giving of gifts in kind, such as clothing or food. But as a semi-permanent refugee community emerged in Britain the needs of assistance became increasingly complex. Organizations expanded giving to include cheap or free health care, education, and grant in aid wages along with the intangible services of advice and guidance. Apart from the War Refugees Committee, the National Food Fund, Belgian Refugee Food Fund, Women's Emergency Corps, Catholic Women's League, Belgian Lawyers' Aid Society, Belgian Journalists' Emergency Fund, Belgian Doctors and Pharmacists Relief Fund, Belgian Orphans Fund, Anglo-Belgian Lace Depot, Exiled Gentlewomen's Outfitting Association, Belgian Cooks Society and the Belgian Repatriation Fund dealt exclusively with refugees in England.<sup>118</sup>

The War Refugees Committee (WRC) in particular stood as one of the most important organizations offering assistance to Belgians in Britain during the war. Founded on August 23, 1914 the committee was guided by the notion that philanthropy was the domain of the wealthy and that "influence" counted more than "representation." In practice the WRC saw its task solely in terms of providing hospitality. Initially relief workers shared the dual assumption that the war would be short and that the job of finding basic accommodation left them little time to worry about other refinements such as providing work for the expatriated.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Steadily this number dwindled down to about fifteen hundred. Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 171. Loc cit, p. 171.

<sup>118</sup> Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 329. Loc cit, p. 329-330. Loc cit, p. 453.

<sup>119</sup> Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 48. Loc cit, p. 206.

In a manner of speaking the refugee relief movement in Britain had no guiding principles or ideology. The movements' central organization (the WRC) began as an ad hoc response to an immediate problem. Other minor organizations constructed well-articulated philosophies at inception, but these ideals were swiftly cast aside by the consuming and mundane work of the here and now. The pragmatic, non-fundamental based nature of relief was hardened by the fact that most people involved in the work were motivated not by an overwhelming compassion for the plight of Belgium—though pity played a part—but by a simple desire to be involved with the war effort. The WRC in particular began as a collection of elite philanthropists and ended as a body of social workers. It was by sheer coincidence this group in particular and not some other form of philanthropic or patriotic endeavor claimed Belgian refugees first.<sup>120</sup>

Government involvement in refugee and other forms of relief was juxtaposed against a private philanthropic structure especially in regards to funding. Financial responsibility was the first thorny question to be addressed by the two seemingly separate spheres. The WRC quickly realized that without governmental assistance their efforts would have limited effects. Problems relating to transportation and housing in particular required the approval and assistance of the British government. For this reason the WRC existed as a private charity dependent on governmental funds. Conversely, the government accepted that refugee relief was a national responsibility yet chose to rely primarily on voluntary efforts. While both the government and the WRC were aware of the ambiguities surrounding their division of labor it was never possible

<sup>120</sup> Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 296. Loc cit, p. 297. Loc cit, p. 450. Loc cit, p. 297.



for one to completely take over the task of refugee relief from the other. Throughout the war the balance of power between the two was tenuous and at times confrontational.<sup>121</sup>

Despite its struggles, the WRC could only claim success in part from its relationship with the British government. Its generosity was based around an arrangement of mutual reluctance in which the government surrendered funds while the committee handed over much of its independence. In regards to funding, the WRC accumulated most of its wartime monies in the early days of the war. After the first few months refugees increasingly became a public responsibility as totals of private benevolence reached a plateau and eventually declined. The happily chaotic independence of the war's early months were a luxury ill-afforded as the war dragged on and as private resources dwindled or went to other causes. By June 1916 the WRC possessed a cache of £97,000. During the last eighteen months of the committees' existence (April 1917 to December 1918) an additional £4,420 in private funds trickled in. In contrast, by the time the last Belgian arrived back home the British government had spent approximately £3.5 million on refugee relief.<sup>122</sup>

Refugees created a peculiar set of problems once they arrived in Britain. Both private organizations and the British government struggled to figure exactly what they were dealing with. In 1914, relief officials for example had a difficult time ascertaining just how many Belgians were in England. While military authorities were concerned with refugees on the grounds of national security, local police concerns regarding refugees were much wider. Refugees ran the risk of being generally undesirable or worse yet, were potential perpetrators of espionage or more serious crimes. Beyond crime one of the most challenging aspects of refugee

<sup>121</sup> Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 60. Loc cit, p. 405. In September 1914, the government had no intention of subsidizing any and every panic-stricken Belgian likely to end up a ward of the Exchequer. Loc cit, p. 67.

<sup>122</sup> Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 406. The WRC received £53,000 in 1914. Loc cit, p. 145. Loc cit, p. 408.

relief was securing adequate housing—both in terms of quantity and quality. Refugees were herded into depots usually reserved for the dregs of society whose accommodations were at best Spartan and at worst dilapidated and dirty. Overcrowding was also a serious problem in areas of war production boom where refugees joined the scramble for accommodation.<sup>123</sup>

Meanwhile, Americans in Belgium and Britain assumed the task of rescuing thousands of fellow countrymen in Europe. Difficulties in completing the mission was compounded as frontiers in Europe closed and travel became more restricted. As was the case with other assistance programs, relief of stranded Americans lacked organization. In the first few days of war Americans crowded the American Legation in Brussels. Quickly the number of Americans that flocked to the Legation proved beyond what inadequate resources could be provided for their assistance. It was at that point Whitlock contacted Daniel Heineman who was himself in Brussels.<sup>124</sup>

Across the English Channel Americans in London faced similar, yet not as dramatic, circumstances as those stranded in Belgium. London was full of Americans who were perfectly solvent at home but effectively broke in Britain. They all were in need of lodging, food, railway and steamer tickets, and pocket money to get them through. Above all they were in need of a new tourist agency that could not only arrange for their subsistence and traveling needs, but also serve as one that would be able to provide cash for their arrangements on the basis of personal checks drawn from American banks. It was under these circumstances that Herbert Hoover and Edgar Rickard organized a committee of acquaintances in London that secured funds from their

<sup>123</sup> Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 88. Loc cit, p. 392. Loc cit, p. 159. Loc cit, p. 201.

<sup>124</sup> Kellogg, *Herbert Hoover As His Friends See Him*, p. 7. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:76-77.

own credit and arranged the safe passage home for 160,000 fellow countrymen without personal profit or gain.<sup>125</sup>

Hoover and Rickard worked in concert with Ambassador Walter Hines Page in London to remedy the situation. Hoover's participation relieved a great deal of personal weight from the Ambassador who initially assuming the burden and responsibility of coordinating several different efforts himself. Working quickly in August 1914, Hoover used his experience in managing large engineering projects to reduce the mass of confused Americans into an orderly group. With ten other Americans he guaranteed an American Bank in London against transaction losses and announced that all sorts of American paper would be exchangeable for hard currency. Hoover also arranged transportation with steamship companies to send the stream of tourists homeward. At the height of exodus from Europe, 5,000 Americans passed each day through Hoover's makeshift organization. In accepting checks and paper totaling more than \$1,500,000 the effort lost between \$150 and \$400.<sup>126</sup>

### **Organizing Efforts Leading to the Creation of the CRB**

The experience of repatriating Americans showcased the organizing and coordinating talents that Hoover would soon apply to the CRB. "This was the first time that those friends who were not also his business associates saw Hoover at work," Will Irwin commented in 1928. "Compared to his big engineering enterprises, I know now, it was almost child's play," Irwin continued in the article appearing in the *New York Times*, "We marveled nevertheless at the smooth run of his improvised machine." Hoover's efficient methods of coordinating funding and

<sup>125</sup> Kellogg, *Herbert Hoover As His Friends See Him*, p. 7.

<sup>126</sup> *New York Times*, Jun 15, 1928, p. 10. Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. 3.

transportation for the safe passage home of Americans in Europe was noticed and appreciated in both Britain and Belgium. His services would soon be called upon for a task much larger.<sup>127</sup>

Events leading to the creation of the CRB began taking shape in August of 1914. Movements of various types from different nations were started to bring aid to the embattled country as soon as the outside world became aware of what was happening in Belgium. In the early days of the war many emergency problems were met through funds supplied by the Belgian government and out of the Belgian Relief Fund. It would not be until October 1914, however, that a recognized channel existed to relieve the growing distress in Belgium. Amidst a scene of considerable uncoordinated charitable activity the CRB sprouted roots and began taking form.<sup>128</sup>

Relief efforts in Belgium were at the locus of uncoordinated was charities during the month of August. September by contrast brought the first attempts to bring order from chaos through the creation of the Comité Central in Brussels on the 5th. Initiated to provide unemployment relief to the city and its neighbors, the weight of intense demands flowing in from the rest of the country pressed the Comité Central into the becoming part of the larger Comité National. In the face of these increasing demands, Emile Francqui wrote to the Belgian Minister in London asking him to send out an appeal for global charitable offerings on September 9. Within Belgium the Comité Central worked to provide food relief inside the occupied state as diplomatic channels worked outside the country to raise charitable funds for the program. In Brussels a uniform daily ration of 200 grams (seven ounces) of bread and a half liter (one pint) of soup was distributed. Of the fifteen centimes total price for the provision the individual was expected to pay five centimes of the cost. In making up the difference the Comité National

<sup>127</sup> *New York Times*, Jun 15, 1928, p. 10.

<sup>128</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:237.

contributed five centimes while the rest was taken care of by the communal charity office or by the communal administration.<sup>129</sup>

The problem for the Comité Central and the Comité National was that the work grew faster than it could be organized and dealt with. Organizers believed that the Comité National was perfectly suited to distribute food through the communes to its own people as long as it could secure an ample supply of foodstuffs. The securing of food became the factor that all relief hinged on in Belgium regardless of the scope and breadth of operation. Short term planning coupled with the inability of organizers to see into the future contributed to their difficulties. Whitlock remembered that, “In my own boundless ignorance I had no notion of the quantity of food required until I read the memorandum prepared by the Comité National. The war would soon be over anyway, and if we could only get through the winter all would go well.”<sup>130</sup>

Securing foodstuffs became the most immediate need for the domestic programs of Belgian relief. On September 26, representatives of the Comité Central (including Millard K. Shaler) reached London. Shaler immediately went to enlist his American engineering colleagues in the project of sending food to Belgium. Part of Shaler’s mission in London was also to drum up awareness of the situation in Brussels through publicity and the press in order to solicit support. One of his contacts, columnist Phillip Patchin of the *New York Tribune* sent several cable dispatches back to the US detailing the both the situation in Belgium and the object of

<sup>129</sup> In an attempt to secure the mutual concessions necessary to ensure the provisioning of Belgium, the executive committee of the Comité Central on October 15, 1914 decided to send a delegation to Britain to negotiation with the government and to expand its activities in such a manner as to transform it into a national committee. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 43. Part of this program included a request to have committees formed in all countries by Belgian diplomatic/consular representatives on which Belgium could solicit funds from. Loc cit, p. 14. Later that month four members of the Belgian cabinet, including M. Henry Carton de Wiart, M. Hymans, and M. Vandervelde visited the United States to appeal for aid. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:47.

<sup>130</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:400.

Shaler's mission. In one of the dispatches, Shaler was quoted as saying that the food shortages threatening famine in Belgium could only be averted by shipments from foreign nations. He added that the American government owed it to Belgium for reasons of pure humanity to insist that Germany take favorable action or make shipments through American diplomats whether the Germans agree to it or not.<sup>131</sup>

While Shaler pressed the issue of Belgian relief in London his engineering contacts also began yielding results. After describing the situation to Edgar Rickard he was taken to Herbert Hoover who with John Beaver White, Clarence Graff, and Millard Hunsiker was in the process of repatriating 100,000 Americans through the American Relief Committee in London. According to Whitlock, those who were involved in Belgian relief and those who were about to get involved in the effort failed to realize at the time what a task it would be to feed Belgium. He recalled that if they had known the monstrous task before them it would have been appalling. At the time there were stores of wheat available in Antwerp. The mission was simply one of securing the supply and getting it past the German army to Brussels.<sup>132</sup>

### **Getting Herbert Hoover Involved**

After the work of the American Relief Committee in London was completed many of its members shifted their attention to the task Belgian relief. On October 4, a meeting attended by Hoover at the office of Walter Hines Page initiated the organization that became the CRB. At that moment relief efforts inside Belgium were in a terribly disorganized and demoralized condition. Deprived of ordinary facilities for transportation and communication the Belgians could not hope to effect an adequate organization for assistance themselves. Hoover explained

<sup>131</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 37. Loc cit, p. 39.

<sup>132</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:3. After securing the safe return home for Americans this group (White, Graff, Hunsiker, and Hoover) expected to return to the US. Loc cit, p. 1:3. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:298. Loc cit, p. 1:299.

that it was essential that some neutral agency, possessed of liberty of movement and freedom from the severe measures imposed on them by the Germans should undertake the initial work of bring order out of the chaos.<sup>133</sup>

From the beginning, all material obstacles—such as financial difficulties, shipping issues, or questions of distribution—were to be overcome by careful organization, by efficient application or trained intelligence, and by proven business methods. In the early twentieth century the terms “efficiency” and “economy” were catchphrases of the day. These factors became critical components of CRB strategy and structure. In this process it was determined that Americans were the best-suited to take charge of neutral relief to Belgium. Captain C.F. Lucey believed that only his fellow countrymen could provide the directing influence necessary in the provinces. In his estimation only Americans could secure unity of purpose and efficiency. Using mostly voluntary service the CRB began work with the idea of accomplishing as much as possible through a maximum expenditure of energy and directed intelligence and a minimum expenditure of money. In the early days, delegates literally threw themselves into the breach and did what was to be done without inquiring into what their authority was or whether they were expected to attack the problem which they devoted themselves to.<sup>134</sup>

The first and most important business of neutral relief after the meeting on October 4 was initiating a series of negotiations with German authorities to protect native products from requisitioning. A second crucial task was carving out agreements with the Germans that would govern interaction between the military government and relief work. Success of any relief body in Belgium would ultimately hinge on the attitude and the cooperation of the German military

<sup>133</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:90.

<sup>134</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 54. Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 442. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 174. Loc cit, p. 54. Loc cit, p. 93.

towards the process of ravitaillement. The diplomacy that came to represent the work of neutral relief with the governments of Britain, France, Germany, and the United States presented enormous obstacles from the beginning. In the first months of the war the immediate stumbling block was the British naval blockade and the general state of enmity that existed between the Germans and the Belgians.<sup>135</sup>

The process of breaking through the blockade began on October 1 with a letter written to the State Department by Walter Hines Page in consultation with Hoover asking for the authority to protect relief supplies under the conditions of an export permit. From that point forward any progress made towards the shipping of neutral relief was slow and methodical. On October 6, Page informed Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan that both British and German authorities consented to the export of supplies on the condition that they be dispatched by the American Embassy in London and consigned by the American Legation at Brussels. Critical to the process of negotiation were the appeals of the Central Relief Committee through the American and Spanish Ministers to Governor-General Kolmar von der Goltz for a guarantee of safe passage of Belgian relief.<sup>136</sup>

Timeliness was also factor that American representatives in London and Brussels had to take into account. In Belgium the clock was running out—famine conditions were quickly approaching. On October 13, Millard Shaler reported to the American press that three weeks ago he left Brussels with a \$100,000 credit to purchase foodstuffs for Brussels. Since that time the situation had grown worse. When Shaler departed for London there were 200,000 people

<sup>135</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 106. Loc cit, p. 78. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:341.

<sup>136</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:4. Loc cit, p. 1:8. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 182.



already receiving rations. “I have the authority to ship fifteen hundred tons,” Shaler explained, “but there is no way of getting the food there until the diplomatic red tape is cut.”<sup>137</sup>

The critical point of contention in mid-October 1914 was how to get the food supplies secured through American efforts from England to Belgium. Ongoing negotiations culminated with a series of German guarantees that provided the basis for future agreements regarding CRB shipping. On October 14, Baron von der Lancken promised that food imported by the neutral commission would be free from German requisitions. In discussing the situation with Whitlock, von der Lancken explained that while the German government was well disposed to aid in the feeding of Belgium there was not enough food in Germany to provide for both their own people and the Belgians. Two days later Marshal von der Goltz gave formal, written guarantee that the foodstuffs imported by the American Relief Committee for the Comité Central would remain at the sole disposal of this organization and would be free from requisitions.<sup>138</sup>

With German guarantees secured the American Legation sent Baron Lambert and Emile Francqui of the Comité Central and Hugh Gibson to London to present Belgium’s case before the British government. Before sending their representatives the Comité Central sketched out the basic plan of organization for what would become the CRB in an October 17 Associated Press dispatch, explaining that “there has been initiated here and referred to in Washington a comprehensive organization of an American committee with the purpose of taking over the entire task of furnishing food and other supplies to the population of Belgium, so far as American relief measures are concerned, under the official supervision of the American government.” The following day when Francqui, Lambert, and Gibson arrived in London they

<sup>137</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:9. Loc cit, p. 1:10.

<sup>138</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:53. Loc cit, p. 2:53-54. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 49. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:508. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:350-351.

found the ground swept clean for action. In an almost continuous series of meetings over the next four days (October 19-22) the Commission for Relief in Belgium and the Comité National de Secours et d' Alimentation were created. The outline of dual organization in Belgium relief established during the first day of meetings stipulating that the American commission was to undertake the work of centralizing gifts and supplies, making purchases, arranging shipping, supervising distribution inside Belgium, and enforcing conditions imposed by belligerent governments while the Comité National and the communes was to control the actual handling and distribution of all imported food.<sup>139</sup>

Diplomatic channels were simultaneously working to secure supplies while the superstructure of Belgian relief was taking shape. On October 19, Ambassadors Page and Whitlock received authorization from the State Department to extend their personal patronage to the work of shipping supplies into Belgium. The following day the British government promised to not interfere with the shipment of foodstuffs from neutral countries carried by neutral vessels consigned to the American Minister at Brussels or to the US Consul at Rotterdam. While the agreement opened the door for neutral shipping through the blockade, the limited acquiescence of the British would be wholly inadequate for what would become the shipping goals of the CRB including some 80,000 tons of provisions per month carried by a fleet forty ocean steamers constantly in motion.<sup>140</sup>

In the course of their diplomatic work the three representatives of the Comité Central appealed personally to Ambassador Walter Hines Page in Britain. It was through Page that they were referred to Herbert Hoover. Hoover had been a resident of London for ten years before the

<sup>139</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 40. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 2:39. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 41 and Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 2:40. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 48.

<sup>140</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 36. Loc cit, p. 49. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:305.

outbreak of war and had come to be recognized as one of the ablest organizers among the American contingent in the city. At the time he was in control of a large share of the world's supply of base metals, particularly zinc and lead. Earlier that year Hoover was in Europe securing from various governments their participation in the Panama Pacific Exposition. August 1, 1914 found Hoover in London.<sup>141</sup>

Hoover's work in assisting stranded Americans in Belgium and Britain pushed his efforts into the sphere of relief and benevolence. He was immediately impressed by the seriousness of the situation after having his attention initially to the plight of Belgium by fellow Californian Edgar Rickard. Hoover recommended that perhaps a program of importation requirements for food could be met within the constraints of diplomatic relations if the foodstuffs were consigned to the American Minister in Belgium and distributed under his guardianship. Using his own contacts, Hoover then took the Millard Shaler who was in London with funds to secure food for Brussels to Ambassador Page who promptly agreed to use his standing with the British government to assist in negotiations.<sup>142</sup>

In September 1914 Hoover participated in a series of conferences that drew him into the work of Belgian relief permanently. For three days he sat with Ambassador Page and the Belgian committee, discussing details and imagining the possibilities of relief. Every evening he contemplated his own situation before finally deciding to cast his lot with the relief of Belgium. Working directly with Page, he suggested that relief should be undertaken not only for Brussels but for the entire occupied territory. Hoover also lobbied for the creation of an organization under American leadership with Belgian participation that would protect the Belgians from

<sup>141</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 183. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 2: 39. Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. 3. Kellogg, *Herbert Hoover As His Friends See Him*, p. 7.

<sup>142</sup> Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 2:39, Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:3. Loc cit, p. 1:3.

interference and to secure the coordination of efforts within the country itself. Specifically, he proposed on September 17 that local assurances given by German authorities should be extended to the entire population of Belgium and that direct guarantees should be obtained from the German and British governments since the work of the commission could not rest solely on the assurances of military officers. This memorandum was later considered as the working “constitution” for CRB and Comité National work.<sup>143</sup>

By the end of September, Hoover realized what his decision to head Belgian relief efforts meant. At the same time he found many of his associates from the American Relief Committee—men including Millard Hunsiker, Edgar Rickard, and John Beaver White—willing to assist him in this new undertaking. On October 12, Hoover made a formal proposition to Ambassador Page establishing that all funds raised in America for the aid of Belgians should be concentrated to the feeding of the civil population and that an American committee should be concurrently authorized by diplomatic representatives to act as the agency to centralize, disburse, and administer all funds related to the project. After the proposal was immediately accepted, Hoover issued an appeal the next morning to the American press and cabled a personal message to Whitlock requesting him to reinforce his explanation of the situation to President Wilson.<sup>144</sup>

News of the projected American organization for relief in Belgium spread quickly. A critical component of CRB success during the war would prove to be its use of the press. Hoover repeatedly used his personal relationships with newspapers and newsmen back in the states to plead his case before the American people. He also considered the public relations component of the CRB to be one of its most important departments. On October 15 the world

<sup>143</sup> Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. 3. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:5.

<sup>144</sup> Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. 3. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 38. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:4. Loc cit, p. 1:4-5.

was introduced to the organization that seven days later would be permanently recognized as the CRB through an Associated Press dispatch in which Hoover outlined the problems in Belgium and his plans for their solution. In the interview, Hoover again commented on the necessity of centralizing all funds collected outside of Britain under an individual or individuals familiar with existing conditions in Belgium. In a memo to Page five days later, Hoover explained in detail the importance of the press writing that in order to maintain an open gateway into Belgium and at the same time protect the native food supply from further absorption by the occupying army, it would be necessary to create the widest possible feeling (in both belligerent and neutral nations) as to the rights of the Belgian population which is dependent normally upon importation of food supply that one of the first duties of the American organization will be to create such a public opinion as widely as possible.<sup>145</sup>

Herbert Hoover immediately gained a stellar reputation for his efforts in relieving Belgium. In October 1914, Hoover was a relative unknown outside of the mining industry and the business world. With his odd pervasiveness, Hoover naturally drew men to him and won their loyalty, friendship, and confidence. A common characteristic among CRB volunteers throughout the war would be their loyalty to the chief. With his characteristic modesty, Hoover always depreciated the tendency to attribute the success of the commission to his own efforts. He sought to make the CRB an institution by setting it in motion in such a way that it would not depend on any one man or group of men. Whitlock commented within three months of beginning CRB efforts that “I admire this man Hoover, who has a genius for organization and for getting things done, and beneath it all, with his great intelligence, he has a wonderful human heart.” Whitlock also observed that “One could not talk with him long without seeing that there

<sup>145</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 40. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:15.

was great idealism there; it showed in the first words he spoke concerning the Belgians and their suffering. He had them on his heart already.” Emile Francqui concurred. “We have the good fortune to have at the head of the commission in London a man of action in every sense of the term, Mr. Hoover,” he added. When Hoover was pressed to directly take over the relief of Brussels on October 18, the American and Belgian contingent knew that his experience in the purchase and transport of materials and his familiarity with the landscape made him well suited for the job.<sup>146</sup>

Hoover was reluctant at the time to take charge of relief efforts in Belgium. While sympathetic to the problems of the Brussels committee, Hoover pointed out that he knew little about food management and that had great professional obligations to important concerns over the world, all of which were in difficulty because of the war. After a long evening of contemplation, the next morning Hoover and his wife Lou concluded that duty called him to accept. Upon accepting the task Hoover asked for the stipulation that he pay his own expenses and receive no compensation for his work. At the time Hoover did not recognize the impact of the decision. He was about to enter public service through an organization that for four and a half years managed the feeding of ten million people. At the time Hoover and other relief officials believed that the war would last no longer than the next summer (1915). Their initial strategy called for the temporary relief of Belgium until the next harvest.<sup>147</sup>

### **The Purpose of the CRB (October 1914)**

Hoover finalized his plans for Belgian relief in the days before the CRB was officially launched on October 22, 1914. Hoover laid out precisely what he envisioned for Belgium in an

<sup>146</sup> Taillandier, *The Soul of the “CRB,”* p. 104. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 47. Loc cit, p. 48. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:81. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:400. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 91. Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 1:2.

<sup>147</sup> Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 1:2. Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 1:3. Hoover, Herbert. *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover (Volumes I and II)*. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1951 and 1952), p. 1:156.

October 20 memorandum addressed to Walter Hines Page. He began with the statement that in order to provide for the proper distribution of foodstuffs and relief there must be a consolidation of organization in Belgium on national lines with sub-committees in provinces and communes under strong central control. He continued with the statement that in order to provide for the purchase and shipment of foodstuffs abroad, for the mobilization of charity throughout the world, and for the guardianship of the supplies in Belgium and the supply of American members to Belgian committees, an American committee should be set up under the patronage of American Ambassadors and Ministers, with a head office in London and branches in New York, Rotterdam, and elsewhere as may become necessary.<sup>148</sup>

Hoover also had a clear plan in regards to the financial arrangements of Belgian relief. In his memorandum to Page, Hoover explained that in order to solve the economic situation outside of charity and to obtain permits for exchange transactions inside and outside of Belgium from belligerent governments the organization should in the first place obtain possession of Belgian bank balances abroad and make counter payments to Belgian owners from the sale of foodstuffs to avoid the actual transfer of money over the frontier. Hoover also understood that gaining access to the large amounts of working capital necessary to secure foodstuffs from external markets would also prove challenging. As a partnership subject to unlimited liability the original banking interest immediately withdrew from the program. In order to meet these large financial obligations he recommended that a loan be secured from England and guaranteed by Belgian banks specifically for this purpose. Within the organization itself, Hoover demanded that from

<sup>148</sup> Wilson, Joan Hoff. *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*. (Little, Brown, and Company, Boston and Toronto, 1975), p. 46. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:14. Loc cit, p. 1:14-15.

inception a strict and complete system of accounting for all financial transactions, including accurate statistical records covering the movement of all commodities, should be kept.<sup>149</sup>

Dealing with belligerents was one of the most apparent issues as questions regarding the organization of Belgian relief began to be worked out. Hoover recognized that a fragile balance was needed and that an uneasy coexistence might be necessary. He predicted even before relief work commenced that there would be a great deal of antagonism on the part of the Allies concerning the introduction of foodstuffs into Belgium because of their position that it was the duty of the occupying army to feed the civil population. In view of this position, the securing of German assurances, maintaining strict neutrality and the opening of the naval blockade became all the more important to both Hoover and the CRB. Hoover's initial belief that penetration of the blockade and the Occupation Zones could be accomplished only through the intervention of Americans with the authorizations and guarantees from both belligerent groups and under the patronage of powerful neutral governments remained a fundamental part of the CRB throughout the entire course of its work in Belgium and Northern France. As a result of its position the commission came to be regarded as a kind of informal state with its own international agreements under special privileges and immunities granted by the belligerents including travel passports and the recognition of the CRB flag on the open seas.<sup>150</sup>

Despite the complexity of the operation, Hoover categorized the work of the CRB into three distinct functions. The first job of the commission was to protect foodstuffs and native

<sup>149</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:15. Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. vii.

<sup>150</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:15. Loc cit, p. 1:27. The special neutral status that the CRB enjoyed was achieved in November 1914. In the process of negotiations with belligerents (Britain and Germany in particular) the British demanded further guarantees from the German government not to interfere with any of the commission's ships in service on top of promising not to requisition its food supplies once they reached Belgium. The assenting to this demand opened up the negotiations that culminated with the recognition of the CRB's flag, special markings on vessels, and the rigid system of safe passes for relief voyages. Loc cit, p. 1:306.



produce in Belgium. The second task was to purchase and transport foodstuffs into Belgium through the subventions they receive from the Comité National and other sources. The third duty of the commission was to stimulate the philanthropic efforts that would rescue the Belgian civil population from starvation.<sup>151</sup>

After over a month of careful analysis and planning the American Commission for Relief in Belgium was formally organized at a meeting held in London's Wall Buildings on October 22, 1914. Hoover told those in attendance that Ambassador Page had asked him to set up an organization to carry into execution the engagements undertaken by the American Ambassadors in London and Brussels with regard to the importation of foodstuffs and general relief for Belgium. This sentence became the *de facto* charter for the commission. Initial membership included Chairman Hoover, Vice-chairman Daniel Heineman, Treasurer Clarence Graff, and Secretaries Millard K. Shaler, Brand Whitlock, and William Hulse.<sup>152</sup>

Four pressing orders of business were addressed in the first committee meeting. First and foremost was the question of finding money for the purchase of food supplies. The second concern dealt with the necessity of coming to an agreement with the British government so that the blockade of German ports and the invaded territory could be suspended at a place to be determined as a port of entry for relief supplies. The third point regarded the desire to obtain guarantees first from the German government and then from the French that imported food for Belgium would be reserved for the civil population exclusively. The fourth issue decreed that in

<sup>151</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:218.

<sup>152</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 49. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:16-17, Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 49. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:18.

order to make distribution certain and effective it was crucial that the commission have entire control over all supplies imported.<sup>153</sup>

The first meeting of the American Commission for Relief in Belgium was accompanied with a press statement released by Hoover explaining the organizational structure of the committee and the nature of the situation in which they were dealing with. “It is obvious that with the scarcity of foodstuffs in Holland it is impossible to get supplies on that side for more than emergency service,” Hoover explained, “A stream of supplies must be started from America if the Belgians are to be saved from famine.” “The supplies available at the relief stations in Brussels (on) Monday were believed to be sufficient to last until Saturday, and these were available only because a certain quantity of wheat was received from Antwerp,” he continued, “That source is now exhausted.” In regards to available food supplies that situation was also becoming grim. Hoover reported that “Because of the restrictions on the exportation of food it is extremely difficult to find even emergency provisions (in Britain), and supplies from America are even more imperatively needed than was originally expected.”<sup>154</sup>

Neutral shipping was already underway by October 22. Hoover announced that the British government agreed to contribute \$750,000 a month while food to the value of \$250,000 had already been bought in the name of Ambassador Page and Minister Whitlock and was to be distributed in Belgium beginning on October 26. He was confident that relief could reach the Belgian population through the newly established CRB system of shipping via neutral ships bearing authorization slips from belligerents. Hoover confided to Page that “We are the only

<sup>153</sup> Taillandier, *The Soul of the “CRB,”* p. 108. Loc cit, p. 108-109.

<sup>154</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:18. Loc cit, p. 2:242.

channel through which such relief can be introduced into Belgium and the Comité Central is the only practical organization through which it can be distributed.”<sup>155</sup>

The organizational structure of the CRB that retired in the summer of 1919 became quite different from the framework originally designed in October 1914. At inception the commission was organized more or less as a temporary American Relief Committee to aid the suffering and the destitute in Belgium. Born out of the exigencies of the military situation, the CRB was created as a temporary gap, or rather valve, in the iron-bound ring of the belligerent lines through which food could pass to the population living under German rule and by its consequence save the lives of millions. As time passed it transitioned into a permanent neutral organization carrying on semi-diplomatic relations with at least seven governments (Germany, Britain, France, Belgium, US, Holland, and Spain) while playing the part of a commissary department for more than seven million people in Belgium and two million in France and acting as the medium of mobilization for the charity of the world.<sup>156</sup>

The time frame of relief efforts itself was certainly a manner of conjecture in the fall of 1914. Few people believed in late October 1914 that it possible that the war could last more than a few months. When the CRB was organized the idea prevailed that once the winter was over the commission’s work would come to an end. In the interim, the relief that intervened was a system of food exports (based on emergency shipments of food) aimed at immediate threats of famine. As time passed the program came to include clothing and other products that preserved the health of people in Belgium and Northern France. Hoover himself expected that his

<sup>155</sup> *New York Times*, Oct 22, 1914, p. 2. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:18. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 52.

<sup>156</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1.

connection with the enterprise would end once negotiations regarding export permits were completed. What he found was that it was only the beginning.<sup>157</sup>

While the nature, scope, and breadth of relief work changed over time, the organizational structure stayed fairly constant during throughout the war. From the beginning the CRB established its primary office in London with secondary bases of operations working in Rotterdam, New York, and Paris. Housed at 3 London Wall Buildings, the diplomatic direction of the entire work of Belgian relief including the solicitation or purchase of supplies and their shipment was handled through this office. Initially Millard Hunsiker served as the director for Britain, John Beaver White was the primary purchasing agent and manager of shipping, and Edgar Rickard handled publicity. Seven to ten delegates who exercised general control over the work inside the occupied regions were assigned to the Brussels office. At the local levels there were one or more delegates assigned to each of the nine Belgian provinces and in the six zones of the German army in Northern France to supervise the distribution and to keep an eye on the Germans. This structure was of critical importance in achieving the CRB goal of unified control over the flow of foodstuffs into Belgium.<sup>158</sup>

The organizational strategy struggled for clarity well after the structure was in place however. The status of the commission as the sole channel through which supplies could be sent into the occupied territories was not generally understood outside of the CRB. In America the impression prevailed that the commission was simply a London committee under Ambassador Page's direction to forward supplies to Belgium. As a result American committees that formed to assist Belgium sent their contributions to the American Embassy in London, the Legation at The Hague, or the American Consulate instead of the CRB offices in New York. Early public

<sup>157</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1-2. Loc cit, p. 2. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:117-118. Loc cit, p. 1:4.

<sup>158</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 198. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 1:8.

statements released by the CRB were aimed at clearing up this confusion by first bringing pressure on the US State Department to authorize American sponsorship of the enterprise and second to make the purpose of the commission better known across the nation.<sup>159</sup>

Hoover and the CRB understood the importance of charity work and philanthropy among the populations of not only Britain and America, but the world as a whole. Charitable contributions formed the first link in a chain that began its life as a gift in kind and ended as a meal, a piece of clothing, or some other form of direct relief in the communes of Belgium. Much like foodstuffs, the supply of charity rarely remained constant or consistent with the changing needs of the commission. To handle the flows of gifts it was determined that all charity should be turned over to the provisioning department with its full value being added to the general stream of goods destined for Belgium. The value of the gift food was determined on the basis of the cost of replacement at the time of giving with the benevolence department being credited the estimated value against its books.<sup>160</sup>

Public relations were also a critical component of maintaining supplies of foodstuffs and charity for Belgium. Hoover himself knew the psychological and fund-raising value of a “strong punch cable” dispatched from the “scene of action.” Under the direction of Will Irwin the press department of the CRB New York office instituted a system of daily and weekly news releases to papers and press associations and prepared pamphlets and handbooks for the use of committees in the field. Weekly and monthly CRB publications carried articles on Belgian relief while both magazines and newspapers in America donated advertising space for appeals for contributions. The primary purpose of the CRB press campaign was to bring in contributions to the numerous collecting agencies. A secondary purpose was the mobilization of general support for the whole

<sup>159</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:239.

<sup>160</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 59. Loc cit, p. 83.

relief enterprise. One of the most effective appeals for Belgian relief was the “Famous Authors Service” conceived of by Will Irwin. Over a period of three months these syndicated stories by authors including George Bernard Shaw formed a serial appeal appearing in the leading newspapers of America.<sup>161</sup>

Hoover recalled in a 1917 report on benevolence what he thought the nature of CRB work would be in October 1914 and how it changed over the course of the war. At the outset it was hoped that the need for relief would continue for only a few months. Three special conditions surfaced that necessitated the extension of relief beyond all initial expectations. The first was an increase in destitution partly attributable to rising foodstuff and transportation prices. The second was attributable to the inability of world charity to keep pace without substantial and regular assistance through governmental subventions. The third involved the problem of the internal credit necessities supplied by receipts from food sales outrunning available commercial funding.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> With basic diplomatic guarantees in hand, the CRB began in the fall of 1914 to broaden and intensify the appeal for public support of relief by encouraging the creation of new committees and by collaboration with existing ones through the New York office. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:243. Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 2:36-39. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:245. Loc cit, p. 2:245-246. Loc cit, p. 2:246.

<sup>162</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:323. By February 1915 the British were advancing £500,000 and the French 12,500,000 francs a month to the Belgian government for CRB work.

## CHAPTER FOUR: “*The Largest Commissary Undertaking the World Has Ever Seen*”

### The First Actions of the CRB (October-December 1914)

With its initial charter in place the American Commission for Relief in Belgium leaped into action. Decisive movement, not rhetoric was called for in late October 1914. Two days after its public launching the commission released a statement published in the American press expressing that the commission realized that its work would require vast quantities of American grain and that work was underway to create an American branch of the commission to handle contributions of grain and money. Meanwhile, Ambassador Page impressed upon the Secretary of State the seriousness of the situation and explained how the commission was handling American assistance. Page told Bryan that since food cannot be bought on this side of the world the American committees should confer with Hoover through the American Embassy in Britain as to what kind of food was needed and how to send it instead of sending cash. “Money sent will be of no use,” Page declared, “Food sent except through the Commission may never reach Belgium or be confiscated.”<sup>163</sup>

Questions of finance and operations were also in the minds of commission members after going public. On October 26 Hoover wrote to Emile Francqui expressing his concerns over the money required to purchase food relief. To purchase the necessary 60,000 tons of wheat, 15,000 tons of maize, and 3,000 tons of rice and dried peas required the mobilization of between £800,000 and £1,000,000. Organizationally the commission was changing quickly as well. On the same day Hoover wrote to Francqui with his concerns about securing proper financing it was decided to drop the word “American” from its name and invite the Spanish diplomatic

<sup>163</sup> In a letter to Lindon Bates, Hoover restated the position that was to be repeated over and over again in the British and American press—that it was certain that seven million people in Belgium were on the verge of famine. “The situation is one of the greatest gravity,” Hoover explained. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:251. *New York Times*, Oct 25, 1914, p. 5. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:20.

representatives and consuls in London and Belgium to join in the work. The addition of Spanish representatives made Señor Don Merry del Val and the Marquis de Villalobar honorary chairmen of the commission.<sup>164</sup>

Engendering American participation in Belgian relief at the local level was another task that the commission moved to address quickly. Hoover detailed the situation regarding Belgium in a message to American W.J. Chalmers in Chicago on October 27. “The Belgian National Relief Committee in Belgium (is) in desperation securing food supplies for their people (and) have appealed to America (to) procure and arrange for transportation and guardianship of foodstuffs in Belgium,” Hoover explained. The chairman also made a personal appeal for assistance, “I would be glad to know if you would associate yourself with this effort and surround yourself with men of standing in Chicago as a branch of this committee who could undertake our work in that center.”<sup>165</sup>

Hoover made contact with other Americans in a similar manner across the country during the fall of 1914. An American press release on October 22 explained that because of the restrictions on the exportation of food it was extremely difficult to find even emergency provisions in Belgium. This situation made supplies from America even more urgently needed than originally expected. In order to bring new communities into activity, Hoover urged friends in America and elsewhere to take the lead in mobilizing support of relief in their communities. Telegrams were also sent to state governors asking them to appoint committees or otherwise assist in the campaign. By the end of October, committees were independently organized in Connecticut, Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, and Nebraska. In November, California, Kansas, Louisiana, New Hampshire, and Oregon, while Alabama, Georgia, and North Carolina followed

<sup>164</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:32. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 51.

<sup>165</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:247.



suit in December 1914. By mid-January 1917 a total of thirty-six states had contributed through local Belgian relief committees.<sup>166</sup>

As November began the issue of extending private philanthropy through public channels remained critically important. Throughout the war the purchase of foodstuffs required a large supply of liquid/working capital. During the early days of war however the CRB possessed little of the two most important things they required for success: foodstuffs and cash. In a November 3 letter to the diplomatic patrons of the CRB, Hoover confided that provisioning the entire nation of Belgium appeared to be such a large order that it cannot depend exclusively on private funding for its positive resolution. “(While) every possible devise to secure private philanthropy will be used by this commission and no doubt will (succeed),” Hoover predicted, “there still remains the fact that such a supply is not dependable and that if the situation is to be handled properly and systematically we have got to have a substratum of government subvention.”<sup>167</sup>

The press for local participation continued alongside new efforts to foment governmental participation. In the *New York Times* on November 3, Hoover was quoted as saying “There are undoubtedly many committees organized and (are) organizing in different parts of the country for Belgian relief.” In the first week of November the CRB sent out a series of appeals to individual states. The Governor of Iowa received a telegram from Ambassador Page via the US State Department explaining in detail the organization and purpose of the Commission for Relief in Belgium. Reaching its destination on November 6, the cable began with the clear designation that the CRB was the only agency that has the machinery for distribution of food in Belgium and

<sup>166</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:18. Loc cit, p. 2:244.

<sup>167</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:22-23. Loc cit, p. 1:23.

concluded with the statement that it works with the only committee in Belgium for local distribution in every community.<sup>168</sup>

Once organized, local committees made appeals to community on behalf of Belgium. In the November 9 edition of the *New York Times* the Belgian Relief Committee of New York asked “the people of the United States to relieve the distress of the unfortunate people of Belgium whose homes have been devastated by the war and who are not in desperate need of food.” Relaying word from London, the appeal explained that “in order to meet the absolute necessities, food must be imported in very large quantities from America.” The column was careful to explain the nature of relief and its trustworthiness. The article concluded that “Every precaution seems to have been taken to insure the delivery of supplies to needy persons, for whom otherwise no provision whatever would be made.” On November 13 the CRB issued a statement of its own that also appeared in the *New York Times* calling for generous Americans who were unable to donate money to contribute food. “Each American farmer, out of the abundance of his crop, and every resident, from his own store, can well afford a few bushels of grain,” the appeal read, “What is needed is cereals—wheat, flour, shelled corn, beans, and peas, and also bacon and ham, as these are the only articles that will stand the long and difficult transport conditions.”<sup>169</sup>

While ravitaillement efforts were underway the CRB continued to work on perfecting its organizational structure. Hoover himself paid particular attention to the work of the CRB New York office, recognizing its importance as the center and fountainhead of American relief

<sup>168</sup> *New York Times*, Nov 3, 1914, p. 5. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:255. The spread of the relief campaign in the US made the CRB New York office an important establishment by November 1914. Loc cit, p. 1:244. The fact that the commission was the only agency authorized by the belligerent powers to deliver relief to Belgium and Hoover’s announcement that the CRB would pay all freight charges on food contributed in America made the New York office responsible for arranging the transportation of all gifts in kind and for the purchase and forwarding of supplies made possible by cash contributions. Loc cit, p. 1:244-245.

<sup>169</sup> *New York Times*, Nov 9, 1914, p. 1. *New York Times*, Nov 9, 1914, p. 4.

destined for Belgium. Explaining the desired structure, Hoover told Lindon Bates in New York on November 11 that the CRB wished to avoid overlapping existing committees in soliciting money but would offer all agencies free transport for any foodstuffs they provide. In regards to methods of shipping, Hoover explained that it was most preferable to have express railway companies agree to collect and deliver supplies free to the seaboard. Hoover concluded by telling Bates that the purpose of the CRB New York office was to place the commission's machinery for the transport of foodstuffs in close cooperation with all previously-existing Belgian relief organizations in America. Three and a half weeks later, Bates issued a statement on behalf of the CRB to the American press. "A shipload of food a day is what the Belgians must have if they are to be saved from starvation," Bates began in the piece. "It will take 6,000,000 pounds of food a day, and it is to the United States that these people must look for their chief assistance..." the *New York Times* quoted him as saying.<sup>170</sup>

On November 14, Hoover gave Emile Francqui a status report on relief efforts in Belgium. Hoover spoke of four accomplishments in his message detailing the work of an organization that was little more than three weeks old. In staccato measure he proclaimed that the CRB had opened an office in New York and had advised the public that they would transport foodstuffs to Belgium for free; had secured the assistance of the two largest shipping companies in England and that they agreed to handle CRB shipping at no cost; had also secured the voluntary services of one of the largest food firms in the Baltic for free; and had taken steps to exercise responsible management in the handing of food. By mid month the stage was set for

<sup>170</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:255. Loc cit, p. 2:256. *New York Times*, Nov 27, 1914, p. 12.

relief to begin its arduous trip from American farms, towns, and major cities to the Belgian communes.<sup>171</sup>

The challenges facing the CRB began to be better understood by the beginning of December 1914. The commission announced on December 2 that “the task of provisioning 7,000,000 people for months, requiring the dispatch of a shipload of food every other day, is the largest commissary undertaking the world has ever seen, and demands the closest cooperation.” Beyond food the peculiar challenges involved in dealing with belligerents were also becoming clearer. Commenting on the German position, Hoover explained on December 5 that Germany does not harbor the slightest objection to the importation of food stuffs for Belgians. He added that since they were not responsible for the overseas blockade the Germans felt no obligation to feed a civil population that in normal times could maintain their own subsistence. By contrast, the Allies contended that a free port for the importation of foodstuffs into Belgium was ostensibly an entreport for the Germans.<sup>172</sup>

Hoover personally focused on the issue of humanly duty during the holiday season of 1914. Subtly he played upon emotions and spoke of responsibility when talking about the potential tragedies in Belgium to the press. This same technique was used repeatedly by Hoover and the CRB press department throughout the war. On December 21, an article in the *Glasgow Herald* contained Hoover’s observations as an American on the situation in Belgium. In particular he focused on the bickering between belligerents that ultimately cost Belgians the most. “Before the question is settled as to who has this moral responsibility for feeding the Belgians,” Hoover remarked, “these people will have been starved, violence will have broken out

<sup>171</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:258.

<sup>172</sup> *New York Times*, Dec 2, 1914, p. 4. *New York Times*, Dec 5, 1914, p. 3 and Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 100. The Allies in general used the point that it was Germany’s responsibility to feed Belgium as its justification in refusing the CRB to continue its activities.

in the country, and there will have been a large loss of life among an innocent people.” In his second observation Hoover chastised the intense national hatreds that again ultimately cost the Belgians most of all.<sup>173</sup>

Despite its numerous growing pains the CRB had forged a general scheme of operation by January 1, 1915. In regards to merchandise, the commission stored all foodstuffs until they were ready to be handed over to the communes and retained full and complete power over the distribution of these stocks until they were in the hands of communal authorities. A December 1914 report on the CRB explained that in spite of the fact that the merchandise was entrusted to the Provincial Committees it was still the property of the commission. As a result the delegate retained responsibility for its safety until final delivery.<sup>174</sup>

In regards to the Germans, the CRB reported that the occupational government guaranteed that all merchandise introduced into Belgium by the commission and distributed by the Comité National would be left alone. Placards were provided by the Brussels office of the CRB to remind the Germans of their promises. To the commission’s delegates fell the responsibility of making sure that these placards were properly displayed at all storehouses, mills, or on merchandise in transit and making sure that they were used honestly and without misrepresentation. Preventing requisitions was among the most important jobs performed by CRB representatives. News reports or even false rumors regarding German soldiers taking advantage of relief supplies would place the support of Britain and even the America in jeopardy.

<sup>173</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, Dec 21, 1914. Hoover: “Each side aligns itself with great obstinacy, and in the meantime the Belgians starve.”

<sup>174</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:39. Loc cit, p. 1:40.

Delegates had to be vigilant if the commission was to maintain its funding from Allied and neutral sources.<sup>175</sup>

After several months of operation the role of the delegate was better defined, taking in large part the final format it would have for the remainder of the war. CRB delegates at the local/communal level were required to keep what were essentially log books of their duties. In these books the delegate was compelled to keep detailed and exact records of ravitaillement under his supervision—including keeping close tabs on all goods received and distributed. The commission also mandated in December 1914 that all delegates should be well versed on the entire organization of relief so they could fully understand the principles on which it was based. While this made sense in print, delegates on the front lines frequently reported that they learned their duties on the job.<sup>176</sup>

Financial planning in the early days of relief also proved to be a work in progress. Monetarily, the committee conceived itself as a charitable operation funded by private donations in kind and cash plus what slender resources that could be gathered from Belgian bank reserves abroad. With less than \$500,000 available for immediate use the CRB decided to place an initial order for 20,000 tons of food per month at a debt obligation of nearly \$2,000,000. The commission believed that in reply to this purchase a generous response by the public would be forthcoming.<sup>177</sup>

<sup>175</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:41. Most frequently the Germans used placards, making official announcements regarding a wide variety of things. On November 7 one of the first announcement placards was posted by General von Lüttwitz in early November 1914 stating that the German government had done all it could to get food for the Belgians, that people should not give money to those who refused to work, and that Berlin time was going to replace Belgian time. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:64. While the changing of official time seemed to be a trivial thing, it was not. It was another statement by the Germans showing their control over Belgium.

<sup>176</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:42.

<sup>177</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:214. Honnold, W.L. "The Commission for Relief in Belgium," reprinted from *Engineering and Mining Journal*, Jan 20, 1917, p. 4. In a letter to Mrs. Hoover on October 26, 1914, Mr. Hoover explained that the "real situation" in Belgium could not be met

Financially this program of purchase was extremely risky. Hoover himself quickly recognized that the task of relief was far greater than these precarious incomes would support. Pressed by the commission the Allies had made their first advance of £100,000 to the CRB while an additional £100,000 was obtained from the Belgian Relief Fund in England by the end of October. Edgar Rickard had also immediately gone to work on planning and carrying out a campaign for benevolent funds. Within two months his efforts generated 100,000 tons of gift food in America valued at more than \$5,000,000. During this time the Rockefeller Foundation became a major contributor to relief efforts in Belgium. Beginning on November 1, the foundation purchased food, chartered ships, dispatched cargoes, and arranged warehouse space for the Belgian Relief Fund of New York.<sup>178</sup>

For the first few months of the war the Rockefeller Foundation played a vital role in assisting the CRB in creating its system of relief while providing valuable funding. Rockefeller's motivation for getting involved was reportedly that "millions of innocent human beings who have taken no part whatever in the hostilities are in danger of starving to death, and too much cannot be done for them." In a press release the foundation explained that the most appalling and terrible effects of war fall upon the non-combatants. To protect them the foundation was willing to provide millions of dollars in the various countries involved if necessary.

Commenting on philanthropic work as a whole the November 2 edition of the *New York Times* believed that "there (are) assurances now that actual starvation will be prevented by this splendid

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without direct exports from states requiring upwards of 20,000 tons of foodstuffs monthly. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:247.

<sup>178</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:214. By November 1914 the Belgian government itself had advanced a million pounds to serve as working capital for the CRB, and agreed to do what they could to obtain a regular monthly loan from the French and British governments which could be then turned over to the commission to be used to purchase food for Belgium with the understanding that the Comité National should pay out an equivalent sum in Belgium in the interest of the Belgian Government. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 110. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 2:40. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:239.

cooperation of the Rockefeller Foundation with the other admirable agencies, that there will be sufficient relief for large numbers, and that the shipping and distribution of supplies will be accomplished in the most (expeditious) and competent manner.”<sup>179</sup>

For the remainder of the calendar year the CRB continued to organize the flow of relief into Belgium while the structure and system of the commission was still in its formative stage. While destitution became the problem first attacked by the CRB, questions regarding relief soon expanded to include the issue of finding a way to introduce a minimum ration for the entire population. This would mean an immediate increase the projected totals of food imports for Belgium. With financial arrangements sheepishly in place the commission’s representatives began arranging shipments of food. As soon as the British Government tentatively approved the CRB plan to ship food into Belgium, Hoover sent Captain J.F. Lucey and Millard Shaler on October 25 to Rotterdam to make final arrangements for the transshipment of two cargoes then loading on the Thames. This first shipment of relief by the commission contained approximately 2,000 tons of flour, rice, peas, and beans.<sup>180</sup>

The modest cargo of two small steamers carrying relief could not reach Belgium fast enough. Mr. Hoover wrote to Mrs. Hoover on October 26 that over one million people were presently on the bread line in Belgium. At the moment there were enough supplies to last the population from one to three weeks. To most of those involved the question remained whether

<sup>179</sup> On November 1, the Rockefeller foundation announced its intention of devoting large sums of money to war relief work in Europe and of sending shipments of food immediately to Belgium. The Foundation went ahead independently of the CRB to purchase food, charter ships, and dispatch cargoes to Belgium. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 62. *New York Times*. Nov 2, 1914, p. 1. Ibid, 8.

<sup>180</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 25. CRB member Vernon Kellogg specialized in the study of nutrition. He determined that that in taking the minimum number of calories per person per day for those who are at rest to be 2000, these families were actually living on a ration considerably less than the actual minimum for a safe bare existence. Kellogg, *Fighting Starvation in Belgium*, p. 166. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:28. Shaler had purchased the food in Britain with a fund of 2.5 million francs previously-entrusted to him by the Brussels committee. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 2:40, 53. Loc cit, p. 2:53. Lucey and Shaler’s progress was slowed by the refusal of the Board of Trade to grant them permission to proceed on the grounds that British governmental authorization only applied to shipments from abroad entering England, not vice versa. Loc cit, p. 2:53.



the efforts at securing funding and food were too little, too late. Ernest Solvay explained in a statement dated October 29 that the population of Belgium was at the point of famine. At the same time however he referred to the CRB as a beacon of hope for the future. Solvay proclaimed, “Thanks to their invaluable and devoted efforts and to their diplomatic negotiations, I think I can say that we have overcome, at least for the time being, the terrible position in which we are placed.” Nevertheless, the prospects remained grim. Reporting on the 2,000 tons of food en route to Rotterdam, the *New York Times* printed Ambassador Page’s opinion that the initial shipments were “wholly inadequate” even if ships are loading immediately in the United States.<sup>181</sup>

On November 1 and 2, 1914 the first supplies reached Rotterdam on the *Coblentz* and the *Iris* respectively. The cargoes purchased by Millard Shaler consisting of 1,777 tons of flour, 414 tons of rice, and 210 tons of beans were delivered to Whitlock in Brussels forty-eight hours after their arrival in Rotterdam. On November 4 the first shipments reached Brussels in sealed canal barges for immediate distribution. Whitlock recalled that “those barges brought more than food—they brought hope.” The door was now open for food to flow into Belgium. The second week’s report of the CRB showed that in a fortnight the commission had delivered 2,283 tons of cereal foodstuffs to Belgian relief stations. By November 13 the commission was responsible for about 17,000 total tons with 13,000 tons of foodstuffs arriving during the previous half month. On November 7, the *New York Times* reported that 400,000 meals were now being served in Belgium daily.<sup>182</sup>

<sup>181</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:247. The following day (Oct 27) the CRB received some much needed financial support through a 20,000 franc subsidy from the Comité National. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 20. *Daily Telegraph*, Nov 7, 1914. Solvay concluded, “Owing to their assistance the future looks more favorable, or less terrible.” *New York Times*, Oct 31, 1914, p. 4.

<sup>182</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 70. Madame Taillandier recalled a slightly different version of the first relief deliveries to Belgium. In her description an old deep sea captain of an American

Any jubilation felt over the first CRB deliveries was tempered by troubling reports that flowed out of Belgium to western newspapers. It was clear that the first supplies received in November were insufficient to meet the needs of the whole population. For the time being these stocks were divided among the districts with the greatest need: Brussels, Liège, Mons, and Charleroi. A reprinted telegraph to Hoover in the *New York Times* explained on November 3 that members of the commission, Whitlock, and other local officials believed that within three weeks the last foodstuffs would be exhausted. The same day a separate article in the *New York Times* quoted Walter Hines Page as saying that “I have never known such a case of need...it will require \$1,000,000 a month for seven or eight months to prevent starvation. In fact, many will starve now before food can reach them.”<sup>183</sup>

Hoover stepped up the pressure for support through a series of appeals while the first stocks of food began arriving in Belgium. “This is not a question of charity or relief to the chronic poor,” Hoover began in an article published in American newspapers, “it is a question of feeding an entire population.” The release further explained that the situation affected the affluent as well as the poor and that the Belgians were attempting to help themselves but there was little that they could do. The chairman’s primary point was that America had to take the lead in providing relief; the British and French were already overstrained and could offer little while the Dutch were dealing with a million Belgian refugees themselves. Hoover’s final comment spoke directly to the situation: “There (was never) such a call on American charity, and

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steamer bound for Liverpool with a cargo of wheat received a wireless message of “Take your cargo to Rotterdam.” Taillandier, *The Soul of the “CRB,”* p. 109. Taillandier reported that this (unnamed) shipment became the first to arrive at Rotterdam on November 5 where Captain J.F. Lucey was waiting for it. Loc cit, p. 109-110. Lucey then forwarded the cargo to Whitlock in Brussels. Loc cit, p. 110. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock,* p. 1:lvii-lviii. Loc cit, p. lviii. *New York Times*, Nov 9, 1914, p. 2. This was after arranging for the purchase of 10,000 tons of cereals during its first week of operations. Kellogg, *Fighting Starvation in Belgium,* p. 27. *New York Times*, Nov 9, 1914, p. 2. *New York Times*, Nov 7, 1914, p. 5.

<sup>183</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium,* p. 83. *New York Times*, Nov 2, 1914, p. 6. Loc cit, p. 1.

there never was a famine emergency so great.” Periodically the efforts of the press campaign were blunted by negative perceptions, doubts, and rumors. In early November, Captain J.F. Lucey reported a measured increase in uneasiness among Belgians in Brussels over quotes in the American press suggesting that supplies would be seized by the military authorities. They worried that requisitions would stop all imports—much like the British had publicly threatened. Lucey attempted to persuade them otherwise.<sup>184</sup>

The national press campaign of the CRB was supplemented by an appeal by Chairman Hoover to state and local officials. On November 2, Hoover asked the governor of Kansas if he would assist in the creation of a committee for the collection of food or money within the state. Specifically, the chairman pressed the governor for a shipment known as the “Kansas Ships” consisting of cereals and bacon or ham. As was the case with all other relief shipments across the country, Hoover promised the governor that the CRB would arrange for the reception of their contributions and its shipment to Belgium free of charge.<sup>185</sup>

On November 3, Hoover issued a letter to the diplomatic patrons of the CRB giving a status report over existing operations and plans for the immediate future. In regards to program requirements, the chairman reported that a total supply of 80,000 tons per month was required to provide a daily ration of 10 ounces per day, per capita—an amount considerably less than one-half a soldier’s daily ration. Placing this requirement into context, the report explained that it was substantially less than the over 250,000 tons of cereals imported into Belgium normally but well over the 20,000 initially estimated by the commission. In regards to famine, Hoover believed that if the CRB could deliver 40,000 tons for the month of November the commission could be kept going while in all likelihood preventing violence associated with desperation and

<sup>184</sup> *New York Times*, Nov 7, 1914, p. 6. *New York Times*, Nov 7, 1914, p. 5.

<sup>185</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:252.

hunger. The cost of this program was estimated to be somewhere between £800,000 and £1,000,000 per month. Explaining the “economy” of the operation for the money invested, Hoover determined that the value of the cereal foodstuffs taken in bulk to Belgium were between £10 and £20 per ton with nearly £2 per ton dedicated to transportation costs. Under these calculations nearly £5 of food was secured for every pound of expenditure made.<sup>186</sup>

That week Hoover also began a series of negotiations with the British government that produced limited results. Through German assurance regarding requisitioning in place the CRB had secured the limited acquiescence of the British Foreign Office to allow food to pass into Belgium. The British had no intention of broadening their rights extended to the commission and without question would not open the blockade completely for relief purposes. In a November 5 meeting with Sir Edward Grey, Hoover pressed for additional special privileges and suggested that the real solution to the shipping problem was to permit the CRB to charter ships flying the British flag. Making further issue, Hoover also asked that government insurance be made available for British ships in the service of the commission. Grey responded with the steadfast British position on relief work—as long as the Germans continued to requisition native food in Belgium it was impossible for the government to contribute support.<sup>187</sup>

The next series of meeting dealing with ravitaillement were between the Comité National and the Germans. After Hoover’s meeting with Sir Edward Grey the CRB and the Comité

<sup>186</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:21. The program was referred to also in a letter to Bates on October 31, 1914. In it Hoover mentioned that 80,000 tons of cereals were the absolute minimum “upon which the body and soul can be kept together” and that the ration would provide 20 ounces per person per day. Loc cit, p. 2:251. At the time of the reports publication the commission was still working on the issue of payment for the destitute.

<sup>187</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:510. Loc cit, p. 1:305. Loc cit, p. 1:305-306. Hoover further explained in early December the necessity for securing insurance in a CRB memo. In the document, Hoover commented that the moral effect of the war on the shipping industry has been so great that it had become practically impossible for the CRB to secure ships at any price. Without British insurance the cost of shipping to Rotterdam was going to coast an additional £30,000 to £40,000. Loc cit, p. 1:310-311. Loc cit, p. 1:511.

National realized that German influences over Belgian food supplies was a stumbling block in securing funding and support from other neutral and belligerent powers. On November 11 a deal was reached that allowed the free circulation of all merchandise imported by the commission. The German government also promised to take steps in freeing the canals and rivers from obstructions and would allow the use of railroads in the areas which could not be served by Belgium's extensive canal network.<sup>188</sup>

Minister Whitlock was himself working with the Germans to secure formal assurances. On November 14, General von der Goltz informed Whitlock that the Imperial Government was prepared to offer the most formal assurances that any supplies imported would be "scrupulously respected" by the German military and civil authorities and would be exempt from "seizure and requisition." In dealing with food imports the German government promised that possession, control, and disposition of those supplies would be left entirely in the hands of the Comité National or its designated agents.<sup>189</sup>

Steady progress towards negotiating a clear program of importations, promises, and freedoms in late fall 1914 did not mean that the commission was completely clear to pursue its goal of relieving Belgium. On November 14, Hoover sent a letter to Emile Francqui detailing the monetary concerns that still beset the CRB despite the new series of guarantees made by the Germans to the Comité National. In dealing with the issue of gift food, the chairman made a proposal for giving all foodstuffs in Belgium a cash value based on the market that would allow the CRB's books to show the large subscriptions made from various societies and organizations. For accounting purposes this allowed the commission and its contributing members to give a monetary value to charity. Throughout the war the CRB strove to keep strict financial record of

<sup>188</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 79.

<sup>189</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 81.

its affairs. Placing a cash value on all charitable contributions allowed the commission to keep close tabs on its financial standing. Each week during the conflict the CRB produced a financial record for its receipts and expenditures. With only a few days or a few weeks worth of food on hand at any time in Belgium it was critical that the commission was in constant understanding of its current situation.<sup>190</sup>

Hoover in his note to Francqui also mentioned the progress being made by CRB propaganda in America. Current efforts in the United States were clearly a national effort that included money from San Francisco and foodstuffs from Kansas. The chairman was especially looking forward to the shipments of corn forthcoming from Iowa and flour from the Mississippi Valley that were scheduled to leave Philadelphia at the end of November. To facilitate the shipping of these cargoes and others like it the CRB solicited the advice of the leading shipping firms in Britain. Hoover believed that the responsible management of these firms afforded the commission a measure of protection that might not exist if they endeavored on their own to arrange such matters.<sup>191</sup>

The following day (November 15), the first transatlantic shipment of food reached Rotterdam. Sponsored by the Canadian Province of Nova Scotia, the *Tremorvah* based out of Halifax carried 176 tons of flour, 49 tons of meat and bacon, and 2,338 tons of miscellaneous goods. Six days later the first Rockefeller Foundation ship arrived from New York bearing

<sup>190</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:36.

<sup>191</sup> On November 20, the CRB NY office issued a press release (by Vice Chairman Lindon Bates) stating that "It is proposed to send a carload of wheat or flour from every one of the ninety-nine counties in Iowa, Indiana, and California." Bates added that "What Belgium needs most of all is food—any kind of food, (as) long as it will stand ocean transportation." *New York Times*, Nov 20, 1914, p. 12. A week later, the *New York Times* reported upon "enthusiastic giving" in the Midwest, including a \$500,000 fund created at the University of Illinois from gate receipts at special football games. The article entitled "A Food Ship a Day Is Belgium's Need" also included an update on the ninety-nine county effort in Iowa, reporting that the shipment was on its way to Philadelphia. Loaded with 2,000 tons of provisions, the Iowa ship would cover almost one day's ration for Belgium. *New York Times*, Nov 27, 1914, p. 12. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:37. Loc cit, p. 1:38.

3,500 tons of goods. With the coming of both cross channel and transatlantic vessels the supply of relief arriving in Belgium increased steadily. In the month of November a total of 26,431 tons of food were discharged at Rotterdam for the CRB.<sup>192</sup>

Once relief reached Belgium it had an immediate impact. Comité National member Jean van Branden reported on November 21 that thanks to the 17,000 tons delivered to Belgium since the beginning of the month the committee was supplying 600,000 meals daily to 300,000 persons in Brussels alone. While progress was being made in feeding the cities of Antwerp and Belgium, food supplies struggled to find their way into the countryside however. The British paper the *Morning Advertiser* reported that in consequence a large part of the population in famine-stricken villages flocked to the larger centers where food was available. The result was the overrunning of Brussels to the tune of 25,000 new arrivals per day as conditions worsened. There appeared to be no way to stop the migration until the CRB relief system could be elaborated to reach the remote villages.<sup>193</sup>

For its efforts the CRB was beginning to garner praise despite the ongoing difficulties. In Britain the philanthropic community had taken notice of the plight of Belgium, and despite the reticence of the government to become involved, people were taking action. While America can take credit for providing the CRB's organizational zeal, in reality a vast majority of the funding and support for Belgian relief came from the "British Empire." The *Glasgow Herald* commented on the aspects of the benevolence that compelled many Brits into joining the crusade. "There is something romantic in the rapid solution by a dozen skilled and energetic businessmen, moved by a great impulse of humanity, of a problem that has baffled

<sup>192</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 73, Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 201. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 73. Whitlock wrote in his journal that in November 1914 "we" imported over £304,000 worth of food with arrangements made for another £1,273,298 to be shipped directly to Brussels under his direction. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:74.

<sup>193</sup> *New York Times*, Nov 21, 1914, p. 3. *Morning Advertiser*, Nov 23, 1914.

governments,” the paper began. It bemoaned, “In a month one of the greatest shipping schemes in the world has (begun)... (It is) surely an achievement eloquent of the widespread instinct of pity still surviving in the world groaning under the burdens and brutalities of red war.”<sup>194</sup>

An important component of swaying popular opinion was convincing people that the CRB exercised strict command and control over all imported foodstuffs. In a November 24 press release, Hoover stated that “There does not seem to be the slightest fear that the Germans will not do their share in assisting Americans in charge of this food.” The issue, the chairman explained, was handled “some time ago” by Whitlock through the securing of safeguards from the Governor-General (von der Goltz). Hoover explained that the process used by the commission to import foodstuffs into Belgium was the “exact consignment arrangement agreed (to) with the British Admiralty and the German Government for safeguarding foodstuffs.” On November 27, the British government made its position clear, claiming that as far as the Admiralty was concerned any vessel could undertake the voyage to Rotterdam...it just wouldn’t be covered by governmental insurance.<sup>195</sup>

Within Belgium the commission faced similar challenges regarding justification as those it faced inside Britain. T.B. Kittredge of the CRB recalled that in the early days of the war the “slow thinking, hard-headed” Belgian peasant could no more understand the real purpose of American intervention than that of the Germans. Even when distribution began reaching smaller villages in November and December 1914, many peasants remained bewildered. They questioned why foreigners from a great and wealthy land far away would come to Belgium with food for them.<sup>196</sup>

<sup>194</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, Nov 23, 1914.

<sup>195</sup> *New York Times*, Nov 24, 1914, p. 4. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:308.

<sup>196</sup> Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 4:159-160. Loc cit, p. 4:160.



In the meantime, most of Northern France was struggling as mightily as their Belgian counterparts and was in need of assistance as well. While the crisis in Northern France and Belgium began at roughly the same time, the intertwining issues of military control and stabilization delayed the beginning of ravitaillement in this region as a component of the CRB's program of relief. After the fall of Antwerp and Ghent between October 7 and 13, the situation in the vast majority of Belgium quickly stabilized under the German general government. Stabilization (a necessary prerequisite for organized relief efforts) came considerably later in the French regions of occupation however. These areas remained zones of active military fighting for weeks to come and were for a longer time unorganized under the German system of the Étappen (Stages) and Operations Zones. The extension of relief had to wait for conditions in these regions to normalize in one form or another.<sup>197</sup>

On November 24, the CRB agreed to extend relief to the people of Maubeuge. In the following month a similar offer was made to Givet-Fumay through the Comité National on December 31. Under the patronage of the provincial committee of Namur the 20,000 residents of Givet-Fumay received thirty tons of flour in a special train arranged for by the Germans during the first week of January 1915. The number of shipments following this initial arrival could not be guaranteed by the commission however. At the time no additional promises could be made to people of Northern France because its provisioning was beyond the current resources of the CRB.<sup>198</sup>

<sup>197</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 138. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:393.

<sup>198</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:393 and Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 137. At the time Hoover authorized the provisioning of Givet-Fumay, the CRB had neither the resources nor the official authorization of the French Government to extend relief to other French districts behind the lines. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:394. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 138. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:393 and Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 137.

In late 1914 the official position of the commission in regards to Northern France was that while it was willing to assume the added burden of French relief, it could not do so on its own responsibility without the approval and financial support which the French government was somewhat slow to offer. The other stumbling block retarding the flow of provisions to France was again the issue of diplomatic relations. Beyond these factors remained the question of whether the region was safe enough for CRB activity. It was not until February 1915 that the commission was able to secure both the recognition required from belligerents to place ravitaillement on a relatively stable basis and the funding on which the program would be based.<sup>199</sup>

Complications remained rife despite the progress made by the CRB into the Belgian interior. Whitlock reported that in late-November that both the CRB and the Comité National were experiencing the first of a series of tremendously complicated difficulties that were “destined to dog us with an almost maddening persistence during so many months.” The issues that by this point were most pressing (and ongoing for the remainder of the war) concerned the raising of \$10,000,000 every month, the purchasing of foodstuffs in the distant markets of the world, the transporting of it across troubled and dangerous seas, and the distribution of it to seven million people in a land where the whole machinery of common life was dislocated in the midst of an occupying army at war. Over time these late-November 1914 realizations became an internalized component of CRB strategy. Commission members at the time worried that there was no possibility of resuming normal consumption or to even maintain a minimum level of subsistence for that matter. Indeed the first battle in the struggle for program maintenance was over finance and the reality that in late 1914 there was practically none. The second came with the announcement of restrictions by the Allied governments regarding imports. The third battle

<sup>199</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:394.

involved dealing with food shortages caused by factors including market inaccessibility, and shipping losses from submarine attacks.<sup>200</sup>

The issue of direction—meaning the way relief was handled and the multitude of ideas already in practice regarding it—was also problematic. With the CRB/CN organization the various provincial committees and American delegates had varying ideas as to how food should be distributed. Inside this process, each province was developing a distribution system different in some respect from every other that complicated the larger organizational structure of the CRB and Comité National as the coordinating bodies of relief. Quickly it became apparent that a greater unity in the general organization of ravitaillement was needed. Outside of Belgium the men of the CRB were rapidly coming to see that the commission would have to assume great responsibilities. To do so the commission needed to have a well organized office in Brussels with the executive power to control relief operations in the communes from that central location. By the end of November the CRB was already a functioning system of relief, but there were many defects that Hoover wanted to remedy firsthand.<sup>201</sup>

Hoover went thoroughly over the problems of administration in his first visit to Brussels as the Chairman of the CRB. On November 29, Hoover arrived with fellow CRB representative Millard Shaler and Doctors Rose and Bicknell from the Rockefeller Foundation who made the trip to investigate conditions in Belgium. That afternoon the Rockefeller representatives thoroughly cross-examined Whitlock on the situation in Belgium and what was being done by the commission to remedy it. The following day a large contingent including Hoover, Francqui, Heineman, Rose, Bicknell, and Shaler met to discuss the problem of finances. On December 1,

<sup>200</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:361. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:118.

<sup>201</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 94. Loc cit, p. 89. Hoover visited Belgium personally to address the issue of differentiation among the distribution of relief by the Belgian communes in late 1914. Observing the situation he and the commission decided that a tighter control mechanism was necessary to keep relief functioning properly. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:402.

Hoover and the Rockefeller contingent made their first visits to the soup kitchens with a group of Comité National representatives.<sup>202</sup>

The chairman was struck by what he saw on the streets of Brussels. As Whitlock described it the Belgians stood shivering with divine patience in the cold rain holding bowls or pitchers along with a ration card issued by the commune. Hundreds of them received their rations and passed by silently. “It was a sight that I could not long endure,” Whitlock recalled, “I knew what was going on in Mr. Hoover’s heart when he turned away and fixed his gaze on something far down the street.” On December 1, Hoover, Bell, Rose, Bicknell, Francqui, Shaper, Gibson, de Leval, Watts, and Whitlock watched as long lines of poor women and men receive a bit of coffee, chicory, and a loaf of bread. The group stood in the rain and watched the line march by for some time. Each Belgian said “thank you” after receiving their ration; Whitlock had to turn away to hide his tears.<sup>203</sup>

As Hoover toured Belgium for the first time a new series of agreements with the Germans were in the works. In a manner speaking the commission and the occupational government from Germany had a symbiotic relationship in that what impacted one directly impacted the other. By December 1, the Germans had not only agreed to leave imported foodstuffs free from requisition but also suspended all seizures of native cereals and granted the CRB liberty of action within Belgium. The German government also approved a plan of exchange by which the money of the Belgian government could be obtained by the commission

<sup>202</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:39. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:69. Loc cit, p. 2:70. Whitlock recorded in his journal that the two Rockefeller men (Bicknell and Rose) were impressed by the CRB and the conditions in Belgium. On December 1, they were scheduled to begin a tour of Belgium guided by Hugh Gibson and Emile Francqui. Loc cit, p. 2:71.

<sup>203</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:403. Loc cit, p. 1:403-404. Loc cit, p. 1:404. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:72. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:404.

in London in consideration of the payment of obligations inside Belgium by the Comité National.<sup>204</sup>

Despite these concessions the Germans were not naturally complicit towards CRB requests their proclivities towards limited acquiescence notwithstanding. The commission used the provinces of Limbourg and Luxembourg as prime examples of what the Germans reported was happening and what the reality of the situation was. In those two areas the communes made repeated appeals for the right to purchase food in Germany that were flatly and consistently refused. The commission demanded that if the Germans were prepared to feed Belgium they needed to immediately announce the creation of an organization to handle the work. If the Germans were to take responsibility for Belgium, the commission wanted them to do it now. In public the CRB countered German reports that no one was starving in Belgium and therefore no action was required on their behalf with damning evidence speaking otherwise. The fact that 1,500,000 people were dependent on soup kitchens at the moment was proof enough for the commission.<sup>205</sup>

All the while three diplomatic channels that benefited American relief efforts were constantly at work. This triad included Walter Hines Page in Britain, Brand Whitlock in Belgium, and James W. Gerard in Berlin. While the work of Ambassador Page and Whitlock drew more of the attention, the labors of Gerard were not to be discounted. As the direct link to the German government, the work of Gerard was absolutely crucial. Several times during the war the CRB (and Hoover in particular) drew harsh criticism from the German Governor-General for going over his head and pressing demands to the government directly...Ambassador Gerard was always there to remedy any conflicts.

<sup>204</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 100.

<sup>205</sup> *New York Times*, Nov 25, 1914, p. 3.

On December 4, Ambassador Gerard announced from Berlin another set of German agreements relating to the rights of neutral shipping on the seas including a promise that the navy would not seize food on ships bound for neutral ports (Rotterdam specifically). The German government also agreed to permit non-neutral ships to carry food into Belgium via Dutch ports. In regards to expanding the liberty of action for the commission, the promises included a guarantee that food would be utilized for the purposes originally intended. Hoover was generally pleased with the results of diplomatic negotiations during the fall and early winter months. Speaking ostensibly to the British (who still held reservations about the project over the question of Germans benefitting from American relief); he was quoted in the December 5 edition of the *New York Times* as saying “We are meeting with no obstruction from the military authorities of Belgium in the prosecution of our work. Not one loaf of bread or one spoonful of salt that we have introduced has been taken by the military.” The CRB announced in conjunction with Hoover’s message that the recent issuance of general shipping instructions the commission opened up the flow of provisions to the “little sister of the world” Belgium.<sup>206</sup>

The CRB New York office also issued appeal to the American press on December 5, speaking as it had before about the urgency of the situation and the responsibility of Americans to help. “A brave, unfortunate nation of 7,000,000 people is without food, without money for to buy food, without means of using money for the purchase of food if (it) had it,” the plea began. Calling to Americans as the sole means of hope for the situation, the release declared that “We are the only people who can. We have given generously, but we must (still give) more generously if we are to avert the most distressing famine in history.” Accompanying this appeal the *New York Times* included a statement Hoover himself discussing the situation and its tragic

<sup>206</sup> *New York Times*, Dec 4, 1914, p. 4. *New York Times*, Dec 5, 1914, p. 3. *New York Times*, Dec 5, 1914, p. 6. The early-December guarantees made by the Germans were subject to revocation at any point.

implications. “It is difficult to state the position of the civil population of Belgium without appearing hysterical,” Hoover proclaimed. “I do not know that history presents any parallel of a population of 7,000,000 people surrounded by a ring of steel and utterly unable by any conceivable effort of their own to save themselves.” By the end of the war’s first winter the press campaign in America was paying off, bringing in contributions in money, food, and clothing valued at nearly \$6,000,000.<sup>207</sup>

Hoover again met with British government officials after returning to London from Brussels in early December. Meeting this time with Herbert Henry Asquith, Hoover faced similar difficulties as before in dealing with the British but stood up to the Prime Minister nonetheless. Under the influence of the military party the British government held steadfastly to the view that revictualing Belgium was in itself a non-neutral act and that by its nature was an aid to the Germans. Field Marshall Horatio Herbert Kitchener made the cynical and brutal comment on ravitaillement that if the Belgians were to be left to starve it would require more German troops to subdue the revolutions that would break out as a result of the hunger.<sup>208</sup>

The back and forth between Prime Minister Asquith and Hoover showed the moxie that made him so well respected in engineering and mining circles. To Asquith’s point that the chairman had “America’s sympathy only because America feels pity for the suffering Belgians,” Hoover countered with a threat to send a telegram back to the states that would destroy the last vestige of pity held for Britain in his home country. The chairman dared, “Do you want me to do it?” Shocked by such behavior, Asquith responded that he was not used to being talked to that

<sup>207</sup> *New York Times*, Dec 5, 1914, p. 6. The appeal included for one of the first times in print a description that the CRB would frequently use throughout the war to portray the situation: that the Allies and Belgium were surrounded by a “ring of steel.” *New York Times*, Dec 5, 1914, p. 3. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 210.

<sup>208</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:77.

way. “You told me you were no diplomat, but I think you are an excellent one, only your means are not diplomatic,” The Prime Minister responded.<sup>209</sup>

This event was not the last time that Hoover would use threats to get what he wanted. Several times during the war the chairman threatened to terminate all relief efforts immediately if a solution amiable to relief efforts was not found. Under such demands the commission usually received what was desired. With the constant threat of failure—which meant starvation—Hoover was forced at times to use such *fait accompli* tactics. Five days later the chairman announced that in cooperation with the Comité National a program to provide 80,000 tons of cereals a month was underway with a goal of 300 grams of bread a day. The price tag for the program was an estimated \$6,000,000 per month. As was the case throughout the war, funding and food were needed now, not later. Gentlemanly diplomacy sometimes had to be brushed aside.<sup>210</sup>

Despite the progress made in diplomacy, Hoover chafed at the pressure of being placed between the belligerents. When the CRB was first asked to undertake Belgian relief the question was why the Germans didn’t do it themselves—under international law it was the duty of an occupying army to feed the civil population. On the other side, the commission was told by the British that the importation of food to Belgium was relieving the Germans of their moral and legal duties while extending the war by relaxing the demands of the enemy. The position taken by Kitchener and others that having the Germans occupied with hunger riots in Belgium was an advantage to the Allies was particularly offensive to Hoover. The chairman argued that “before the question is settled as to who is morally responsible for the feeding of the Belgians these

<sup>209</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:77.

<sup>210</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 66.



people will have been starved and violence will have broken out in that country.” In his view there would be no advantage won through massive suffering.<sup>211</sup>

The week of Christmas 1914 brought little of its normal cheer, but did hold a bleak sense of hope with regards to the progress being made in Belgium. By this point the relief kitchens in Belgium were up and running. In Brussels some 200,000 persons were receiving soup and bread daily. W.W. Stratton, an Oxford Rhodes Scholar working for the CRB in Brussels described the precise flow of the food lines and the efficient manner in which the kitchens were operated. “Not only is waste reduced to an absolute minimum, “Stratton reported, “but the cooking is in the hands of experienced men.”<sup>212</sup>

One of the highlights of the season—if not the only one—in Belgium was the arrival of the “Christmas Ship” bearing gifts from the children of America. Planning to deliver the presents on Christmas Day, the CRB faced several difficulties including the demand by the German government that all packages be pre-opened in Rotterdam and that every scrap of writing removed before distribution. Edward Eyre Hunt recalled that the labor involved in meeting the German requirement was not the tough part; it was the removal of the charming, naïve little notes, painfully copied in children’s handwriting that was heart wrenching. After months of receiving foodstuffs it was the Christmas Ship that personalized the charity of America to the citizens of Belgium. Hunt recalled that after that point the assistance of America was never thought of again in terms other than “burning gratitude.”<sup>213</sup>

Burning gratitude was exactly what CRB officials received on Christmas 1914. It was an out flowing of emotions that caught many committee members who were reticent to receive

<sup>211</sup> *New York Times*, Dec 19, 1914, p. 3.

<sup>212</sup> By Christmas the food prices in Belgium were steadily increasing as a result of profiteering, higher shipping rates, the loss of German and Austrian imports, and the disruption of world trade. Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 178-179. *Western Press*, December 22, 1914, *Daily Telegraph*, December 22, 1914, *Daily Graphic*, December 22, 1914.

<sup>213</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 225. *Loc cit*, p. 226-227. *Loc cit*, p. 277.

praise painfully off guard. After a dinner, Dr. Rose of the Rockefeller Foundation pulled Whitlock aside and showered him with many expressions of appreciation and kindness, saying that the Foundation was prepared to aid in the ravitaillement of Belgium to the fullest extent of its resources. Speaking from the heart, Rose told him with tears welling in his eyes that the Rockefeller contingent had been everywhere in Belgium and was struck by the patience, forbearance, and charity of the commission. On January 1, Belgians themselves paid their respects to the CRB. Beginning in the early morning hours a constant stream of men, women, and children poured into the American Legation leaving cards or signing their names in a book. A total of 1,749 notes were left for the commission while many more signed the book. Steadily the commission was making a difference in Belgium. Before the end of the year ships from twenty American ports had either reached or were sailing for Rotterdam. Relief work in Belgium was proving to be an American enterprise—from Hoover in London and Whitlock in Brussels to the farmers of Iowa and the financiers of San Francisco.<sup>214</sup>

In late December 1914, Hoover returned to again take up the problems of ravitaillement inside Belgium. The chairman's talents were always in high demand, whether it was in London, Rotterdam, Brussels, or New York. Everywhere Hoover went he found anxious problems to be solved, situations to be disentangled, and seemingly insurmountable obstacles to be overcome but almost invariably he found a satisfactory solution within a few days. One of the newest challenges for 1915 would be the extending of assistance to Northern France. Starvation was being staved off—at least at this point. "India and China are used to famine, but it does not seem

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<sup>214</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:414. Of the Belgians, Rose commented that they displayed no unkindness, only suburb fortitude and splendid faith and unwearied resistance. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:83. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 64. In the half year to come, the cargoes of 102 ships arrived bearing gifts similar to the Christmas ship. Of that total, five were Canadian, three came from Rockefeller, two came from the New York Belgian Relief Fund, two were from Philadelphia/State of Pennsylvania, one was from Northwest Miller group of Minneapolis, and one Californian ship came bearing gifts exclusively. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 228.

in the game that thrifty little Belgium should starve for want of bread,” commented *The Times*.<sup>215</sup>

In many cases the problems for the CRB were just beginning.

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<sup>215</sup> *The Times*, Feb 12, 1915. *The Times* credited the people of the United States and Canada with preventing starvation in Belgium.

## CHAPTER FIVE: “*This Cannot Go On Forever*”

### The Organizational Components of the CRB

Active operations for the Commission for Relief in Belgium began on November 1, 1914 and ended on August 31, 1919. From the beginning it was directed and shaped by the practical wisdom, business efficiency, and straightforward diplomatic acumen of Chairman Herbert Hoover. Commission representative T.B. Kittredge recalled that Hoover brought to the commission a belief in using the best methods and the best men for the job to handle business of relief instead of trying to install new methods into Belgium and its preexisting system communes. While its purpose was to provide relief assistance for Belgium and Northern France, the CRB was set up on a business basis governed by strict accounting methods.<sup>216</sup>

As the only official organization through which all relief was accumulated, shipped, and distributed the commission worked independently yet associatively with the Comité National that handled ravitaillement at the communal level. Under the executive system of the CRB were the two committees that carried out the actual internal distribution of relief supplies: the aforementioned Comité National (comprised mostly of Belgians) in Belgium and the Comité Français in Northern France. While a duality existed between the CRB and the two sub-committees that created in what contemporary terms is considered a synergistic symbiotic relationship, the executive organization of Belgian relief called for decision making strategy in which the directors of the commission operated independently from its constituent components.

Inter-committee membership between delegates did assure that lines of communication between

<sup>216</sup> Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. 13. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 4:164. T.B. Kittredge served as the Chief Delegate of the Limburg Province from December 1914 to July 1915, as the head Delegate of Northern France from July 1916 to March 1917 at the German General Headquarters at Charleville. Was the CRB Historian in London from April 1917 to 1919, and also was a Chief Representative for the Liberated Regions in France from November to December 1918 and again From April to June 1919. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 1:9. Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, AFWWRP, p. 14.

the three distinct organizations were maintained. As its chief executive, Chairman Hoover was well informed as to what was needed in Belgium and Northern France. In a situation where quick decision making was needed to avert the constant threats of famine it was more efficient to employ independent decision making structures that would be resistant to bureaucratic slowdowns. Observers recalled that Hoover could be bold precisely because he had the executive power to do so.<sup>217</sup>

The executive structure of the CRB was developed by its representatives who possessed extensive experience in American business. Most of these individuals combined a finely tuned sense of logical organization with a highly developed business sense employed in their personal endeavors. The *London Times* commented that commission members were not chosen for their familiarity with Belgian conditions (that was handled by the Comité National and Français) or for their experience with relief work—their task was to mobilize the supply industries of two hemispheres with aforethought, thoroughness, and efficiency surpassing the belligerent armies. American business had been praised over the preceding decades for its work the realm of efficiency. It was this same zeal that the commission desired.<sup>218</sup>

Freedom of action was one of the key factors guiding the commission's coordination of relief. Directed by Americans and managed by the patronage of American, Spanish, and Dutch Ambassadors and Ministers the CRB had full responsibility for all phases of collection, finance, and transportation of relief outside the occupied territory. Through its representatives in the Comité National and Comité Français the commission was responsible for the strict fulfillment of the guarantees and stipulations of the belligerent governments in respect to relief distribution.

<sup>217</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 88. Loc cit, p. 91. There was no other way to send food or money into Belgium except for through the CRB, Comité National, and the Comité Français. Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. 5. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 88. This structure of independent decision making was first insisted by Captain J.F. Lucey.

<sup>218</sup> The *London Times*. *History of the War*, Part 51, Vol. 4, Aug 10, 1915 "The Relief of Belgium," p. 444.

As the spokesman for relief efforts the CRB was also charged with the duty of assuring belligerents that promises were being kept at the communal level as well. One of the greatest challenges in this regard was not only preventing requisitions but investigating and proving that seizures were not taking place.<sup>219</sup>

As the executive structure at the apex of relief work in Belgium and Northern France the CRB performed seven specific tasks. The first commission directive was to create a detailed organizational structure for the systematic provisioning of the destitute using both imports and native foods. As a corollary, the second directive called for the commission to coordinate, centrally control, and stimulate charitable effort throughout the world in support of the destitute. The third directive involved the “elaboration” of the necessary organizations (the Comité National and Comité Français in particular) for the equitable distribution of imported provisions to those who could pay for it. The fourth directive pressed for the establishment of financial machinery (through collaboration with various governments and banking institutions) to provide working capital for the commission and to assist in the exchange of local currency for gold so that Belgian obligations could be met. The fifth directive dealt with infrastructure, calling for the overseas purchase of provisions and the shipment of these essential foodstuffs through inland transportation routes in Belgium. As a component of infrastructural coordination, the sixth directive involved the execution of negotiations with belligerent governments to assure protection of foodstuffs on the high seas and non-interference on land. It also included the requirement that all imports be distributed exclusively to the civil population (requisition free). The seventh directive called for the maintenance of accurate accounting by the commission

<sup>219</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:465.

including auditing and other checks upon all branches of work not only to provide evidence as to the execution of all guarantees but to ensure the integrity of CRB administration.<sup>220</sup>

Two entirely distinct and separate problems arose from the carrying out of these seven responsibilities. Once the objectives were set forth it then became a case of how to carry out these executive functions. The first problem (which was also one of the primary purposes of the CRB) was the provisioning of Belgium and Northern France with a minimum supplement of foods beyond what native produce could supply. The second and most difficult problem arising was how to equitably provide food and charity to people in Belgium. This issue was exacerbated by the fact that even if abundant native food stocks existed in Belgium the industrial stagnation and high levels of unemployment in the country meant that the public charity required to support the destitute would be beyond what private philanthropy could provide. In practice, the difficulties that the CRB had to meet in working out an efficient system of distribution and in purchasing/shipping the food to warehouses in Belgium while constantly satisfying belligerent powers that each was living up to their guarantees were so great that the technical efficiency of the organization often had to be sacrificed to the necessity of immediate action.<sup>221</sup>

From an administrative perspective the CRB carefully contemplated what it was trying to accomplish given the challenges it faced. Upon closer examination the problem was not so necessarily one of establishing an efficient organization or finding a system of food distribution that could be understood by the communes and managed without a high level of executive control and inspection. Because it was impossible to teach new business methods within the traditional communal structure the goal of technical efficiency was at times sublimated to the

<sup>220</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 55.

<sup>221</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:8. By late August 1915 the joint cooperation of the CRB and the Comité National to provide for Belgians was costing between £1,500,000 and £2,000,000 per month. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 237.

exigencies of immediate necessity. In its early days of operation the primary goal of the CRB was to get food to the communes as quickly as possible. For this reason the creation of an administrative model with a complete system of checks and control was not instituted immediately. The whole work of Belgian relief was begun as if it were merely a temporary expedient—it was only later when abuses and difficulties began to arise because of problems within the temporary system that the commission attempted to improve efficiency through control. The guiding principle of the CRB hung on a mantelpiece in the lunchroom of the London office. It read “This cannot go on forever.”<sup>222</sup>

While achieving efficiency was not within the immediate reach of the commission it did not mean that this was not a strategic goal. Efforts in late 1914 and early 1915 to improve the performance of the CRB garnered widespread praise for its methods. William C. Edgar of the *Northwest Miller* in Minnesota commented in April of 1915 that he had never before seen an operation that could compare to the commission in terms of efficiency, thoroughness, and wisdom through the combined efforts of the CRB and the Comité National in guiding what was essentially a provisional and emergency organization. Commission representative Colonel E.M. House also commented that he knew of no charity that was more efficiently administered. House was especially impressed by the fact that the commission handled no money, that all financial matters were managed by accounting firms, that purchasing was done through special arrangements, and that the shipping was handled by specialists. “The American Commission has displayed rare tact and executive ability in handling such a delicate situation,” House explained in the *New York Times*, “It has won the confidence of the countries affected by its efforts and maintained an avenue for relief under very trying circumstances.” The Colonel offered similar

<sup>222</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 175. Loc cit, p. 2.



praise for Chairman Hoover who through his work was already establishing an international reputation.<sup>223</sup>

Other individuals directly and indirectly associated with the CRB were impressed by the commission's ability to function effectively. Considering that it was created as a short term, ad hoc organization the results it was producing were remarkable. A key component of its success once being placed on more permanent footing was its ability to maintain executive focus. According to Honorary Treasurer A.J. Hemphill the calm displayed by the commission was an “amazing tribute to the efficiency of the system whereby the relief organization provides and distributes to this whole nation the supplies without which there would be chaos and unthinkable suffering.”<sup>224</sup>

The success that the commission enjoyed was also notable considering the environment in which it existed. The work of the CRB was done in an atmosphere of absolute rule by a foreign foe and a system of military discipline complicated by wild rumors, bitter hate, and credulous optimism. At no point was the situation in Belgium considered safe—meaning safe for the civilian population, safe for commission representatives, and safe as far as the organization remaining in operation. If there was one guarantor of safety—or at least a sense of hope—it was in the ability of the CRB to perform its duties masterfully.<sup>225</sup>

With these factors in mind the commission reiterated its statement of purpose on February 22, 1915 in a single sentence: “The Commission for Relief in Belgium has but a single purpose—to cooperate with (the entire) charitable world in providing sufficient food to keep the people of Belgium alive until the war is over.” Preserving the commitment to this objective

<sup>223</sup> *New York Times*, Apr 29, 1915, p. 4. *New York Times*, Mar 1, 1915, p. 3. House on Hoover: “I hear nothing but favorable reports about the work he and his associates have done (on) behalf of Belgium.”

<sup>224</sup> *Newcastle Daily Journal*, Jul 14, 1916 and *Labor News and Employment Advertiser*, Jul 22, 1916.

<sup>225</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 32.

required a highly centralized form of organization according to Edward Eyre Hunt. Beginning with the comparatively simple problem of feeding, the work developed—almost in spite of itself in Hunt’s view—into a comprehensive plan of national preservation. As the work expanded, the level of commitment and planning attempted to keep pace with the situation.<sup>226</sup>

Behind the single purpose of the commission were a menagerie of duties and demands. Not only was the commission entrusted with the protection of relief work and with the protection of all funds and foodstuffs appertaining to the project, it was also responsible to the Allied and Belgian governments for the observance of all German guarantees given with respect to both imported and indigenous foodstuffs as well as to other matters covered by agreements affecting the welfare of individuals in the occupied territories. As sole administrator of all relief activities for the occupied territories the commission was also charged with the job of mobilizing finance, food supplies, and charity, while protecting and transporting foodstuffs. Once in possession of funds and food, the CRB assumed the duty of retaining possession of foodstuffs until their final delivery to regional warehouses. A critical component of this task was the responsibility of the commission to convey to the Allied and Belgian governments the actual needs of the occupied territories as to foodstuffs and to determine in cooperation with the Comité National the overall needs of the population and the best methods of distribution and transport for the necessary imports.<sup>227</sup>

Beyond the organizational aspects of providing ravitaillement to Belgium and Northern France the commission dealt with other problems external to the situation in Europe. Chief among these problems was the struggle to establish international standing and prestige. Another

<sup>226</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 54. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 210.

<sup>227</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:110. Loc cit, p. 1:71. Loc cit, p. 1:111. An important component of performing this “information” service in regards to the demands of Belgium was the furnishing of full accounts, audited by public accountants of the entire financial operations (including detailed statistical data on costs, transportation, distribution, and benevolence) to patron ministers and the Allied and Belgian governments.

was meeting financial obligations through the mobilization of charity, the creation of exchange operations, and the procurement of government subsidies through negotiation. A third issue was the actual collection of relief goods and the coordination of shipment from all corners of the globe. A fourth problem was the actual determination of the needs of the population combined with the difficulties of formulating a program based on those needs and securing the approval of the belligerents to enact them. A fifth problem concerned the distribution of commodities within the commune system guided by the Comité National and Comité Français once the previous four questions were handled effectively.<sup>228</sup>

Ongoing problems were compounded by various ad hoc and immediate issues that the commission dealt with regularly. In May 1915 the greatest problem faced by the CRB for example was the difficulty encountered in selling foodstuffs for paper money in Belgium. With Belgian currency retaining little to no value outside of the country the challenge for the commission was how to turn these sums into gold or a gold value equivalent. Without a hard currency base to provide liquid or working capital the CRB would be virtually unable to perform its duties in Belgium.<sup>229</sup>

In the process of performing its duties it was not unusual for small problems to grow into serious crises threatening the whole of Belgium relief. Careful attention was paid to even minor issues for this very reason. For CRB delegates the usual problems of insurance, shipping, warehousing, the preparation of reports, and making sure accounts were properly paid was just part of the responsibilities. Added to these were lists of duties including the handling of misunderstandings and complaints on levied by German authorities over inadequate or inaccurate communal reports. In the resulting fray the commission delegate had to be jack-of-all

<sup>228</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:27.

<sup>229</sup> *New York Times*, May 17, 1915, p. 5.

trades to handle the problems that many times were not of his doing. Whitlock himself faced personal difficulties in conjunction with his official CRB duties, including four personal lawsuits against him during the war over shipping disputes.<sup>230</sup>

Despite the serious nature of on-going problems the CRB became increasingly successful in its duties due in part to its efficient handling of “business” which including everything from the practical end of completing transactions to the theoretical end of creating the structures that guided practices. Mable Hyde Kittredge (wife of commission delegate T.B. Kittredge) described the CRB as a government with its own flag, merchant marine and police power operating a neutral state with business in the market of two continents. Through these powers the commission conducted business across barricaded frontiers and by sheer importance and skill of effort had compelled warring nations to cooperate with it. In explaining the financial procedures of the CRB, the *London Times* reported that the commission bought what it needed in the best markets of the world, paid for its purchase, and recovered the money from the communal authorities. The communes under the jurisdiction of the Comité National then distributed most of the foodstuffs to tradesmen at a small profit while the rest went to the communal canteens that supplied food to the destitute.<sup>231</sup>

Careful organization and planning was a critical component of the commission’s ability to handle its business operations. In general, the CRB applied the common sense technique of employing businessmen to handle the business end of the operation while assigning volunteer experts to deal with problems requiring specialized knowledge. At the communal level this meant blending experience with instruction from the communal council that conformed to the

<sup>230</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 210. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:369. Whitlock reported that issues with billing combined with problems of dealing with false reports in the American and British press “well-nigh wrecked the work!”

<sup>231</sup> Kittredge, Mable Hyde. “Taking Care of Belgium.” *The New Republic*, Saturday July 31, 1915, p. 2. The *London Times*, *History of the War*, p. 454.

principles set by the commission to handle relief in the proper manner. On an international level this entailed governments, commercial firms, banks, and transportation companies giving invaluable advice and special services to the CRB during the war.<sup>232</sup>

Purchasing and shipping were an area of relief work that benefitted greatly from the expertise of volunteer business-based assistance. Outside of Belgium and Northern France the CRB set up business offices or secured the representation of agencies in principal purchasing centers and ports of the world. Based out of New York and Rotterdam these offices and committees engaged in diversified operations of assembling relief in coordination with the requests of the commission's central offices. Once in place the CRB secured both concessions in railway rates and vast quantities of free shipping passes along with generous grants of warehouse space and handling services in both the U.S. and Canada. Banks also donated exchange services and paid the full rate of interest on deposits while the British government facilitated with the subscription of shipping insurance. In Holland the CRB was granted free telegraphic service as well as free railway transportation once supplies reached Rotterdam. The measure of value for free services and concessions granted to the commission was not only seen in the lowering of administrative costs it also had a tremendous impact on lowering the price at which foodstuffs were delivered to consumers in Belgium and Northern France.<sup>233</sup>

Another key factor in the successful execution of ravitaillement was the clear delineation of duties between the various parts of the CRB that composed the whole organization. At the top, executive decisions were made by an administrative group including Chairman Hoover and his assistants Vice-Chairman Daniel Heineman in Brussels, Secretary William Hulse in Brussels,

<sup>232</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 4. The London Times, *History of the War*, p. 451. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:439.

<sup>233</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:467. Loc cit, p. 2:439. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 4.

head of the CRB Rotterdam Office Captain T.F. Lucey, and Secretary Millard Shaler in London. These gentlemen considered it essential that there should be no overlapping of functions. In order to do so each committee was made independent within its own area of operations and its activities were confined to the specific parameters of the overall commission. With a keen interest in localized relief it was decided that money raised in a district should be spent on the products of that area...as long as it was economically practicable.<sup>234</sup>

Separation of duties and responsibilities among functional committees became increasingly important as the work grew more complex. In particular, the work of benevolence (collecting charity) and provisioning (distributing charity) were divided into separate and distinct departments. The Provisioning Department was set up with a business enterprise structure which provided foodstuffs for the portion of the population that was unable to pay for them. Charged with the care of the destitute, the Benevolence Department by contrast saw to it that every individual was either furnished with the means to purchase food or receive it through free canteens established for that purpose. The Benevolence Department was supported by public donations and by a fund generated a small marginal charge levied on all foodstuff sales by the Provisioning Department. Out of this fund the Provisioning Department also made advances to the Benevolence Department from time to time.<sup>235</sup>

The ability of the Provisioning Department to obtain rations at the lowest possible price for the Benevolence Department was a critical component of the commission's ability to provide for the millions of destitute in Belgium. Outside observers marveled at the ability of the CRB to

<sup>234</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:lviii. According to the original CRB plan, Shaler was to spend his time between the Brussels and London offices in order to maintain the closest level of cooperation as possible. John Beaver White was in charge of purchasing and shipping, while Edgar Rickard was selected to head the appeals department to mobilize charity of the world for Belgium. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 50. The London Times, *History of the War*, p. 456.

<sup>235</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 90. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:195.

sell rations at a price usually at or below the market prices for the same items in Britain, Germany, France, or the United States. Under commission requirements the maximum sale price for foodstuffs allowed a margin varying from 10 to 50 percent profit that the Comité National was able to use as subsidy for the Benevolence Department to the less fortunate. The low prices charged to consumers combined with the millions in profits earned for the benefit of the destitute were not obtained through a reduction in the quality of food delivered to Belgians. T.B. Kittredge believed that the low cost of foodstuffs and the support it was able to give to the destitute spoke to the efficiency of the commission. Dr. Holland Fletcher concurred with Kittredge on the point that efficiency across the board contributed significantly to the success of the commission. In an article published in the *New York Times*, Fletcher reported that overhead costs were reduced to less than one percent thanks to the engineering exactitude and honesty of Hoover and the volunteer services provided on the part of competent and experienced engineers.<sup>236</sup>

Cost accounting was another feature of relief work that Chairman Hoover paid particular attention to. At every level of the commission he demanded that the books were maintained meticulously not only as a matter of expediency but as a matter of public record. At one of the first meetings of the commission Hoover spoke of the importance of strict accounting: “We are going to receive and expend millions. Some swine, someday, somewhere, may say that we grafted on this money. Therefore I intend that we shall have such accounting, such checks and balances, such glass pockets, that nobody can ever harbor even a suspicion of our honesty.” Vernon Kellogg maintained that the commission’s stringent accounting that was certified by

<sup>236</sup> Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 1:6-7. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 235. Loc cit, p. 236. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 1:7. *New York Times*, Feb 8, 1916, p. 3.

reputable auditors and published before the general public assisted the commission in negotiations with belligerents even in the bitter partisanship of political debate.<sup>237</sup>

Cost accounting also allowed the CRB to answer any charges of abuse, graft, or profiteering. The spring months of 1915 swarmed with persistent stories that the commission was a vast trading organization engaged in wringing out profits from the unfortunate situation in Belgium. The British newspaper *Field* explained that while profits resulted from the selling of commodities to those who could pay the actual price of the foodstuffs were lower than in London. In its explanation the paper cited the “triumph of management” as the primary reason why the commission was able to sell food at such a low price. Much of the “profits” the commission generated were a product of the services that American businessmen rendered in making the commission efficient.<sup>238</sup>

The CRB developed three methods for organizing benevolence in Belgium. The first aspect of benevolence involved the extension of existing charitable institutions to cover all Belgian children. The second step involved enrolling professions and trades to assist in caring for members of their industry. The third part called the creation of benevolent committees in each commune to establish public eating places and to supervise care in conjunction with other agencies through the issuing of ration cards. Overseeing the entire structure of benevolence were

<sup>237</sup> Kellogg, *Herbert Hoover As His Friends See Him*, p. 14. A variation of this quote appeared in the Jun 15, 1928 edition of the *New York Times*, saying “Some swine, when this thing is over, is probably going to accuse us of graft. I want to be ready to pay all my own expenses.” *New York Times*, Jun 15, 1928, p. 10. It is difficult in this case to ascertain what the actual words of Hoover were. The quote in the text was from an article on Hoover by Vernon Kellogg during the war. The *New York Times* piece is from fourteen years later.

<sup>238</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 198. The CRB was in a perpetually difficult position caught between the demands of the Germans and the British, making accurate information crucial. In conducting its business in Belgium the Allies demanded that the Germans should receive no benefit from CRB supplies of native produce. Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 1:16. Meanwhile the Germans demanded that the CRB see that relief was justly and effectively distributed to the civil population in a manner that did not interrupt the conduct of war. Loc cit, p. 1:16. *The Field*, Feb 10, 1917.



a series of checks and balances that determined the truth of the destitution claim, maintained the morale and efficiency of administration, and promoted honesty in service.<sup>239</sup>

Financially the benevolent fund created by the sale of foodstuffs was divided into three parts. In this work Hoover endeavored to minimize the dangers of pauperization. Anyone who could pay for rations was required to do so. In many cases even those who had no money received food in return for a promise to repay the cost of their rations after the war. Once funds were generated the vast majority of this cache was distributed in the form of subsidies from the Comité National to the provincial committees and then from them to the local committees for distribution to the various classes in need. The committee also decided to supplement these forms of charitable relief with assistance to members of the professional classes. In total the benevolent fund was providing a total of 31,350,000 francs a month in late 1915.<sup>240</sup>

Subventions received by the Benevolence Department were classified into two categories according to their original source. The first category of public charity was derived from the profits of the Provisioning Department. Hoover announced in June 1915 that it was the general intention of the CRB to make approximately ten percent profit on all commodities for the benefit of the destitute. The profits from the sale of foodstuffs were to form a tax for the benefit of the poor that if maintained at about 2,500,000 francs per month could support the soup kitchens. Of a distinctly different origin but serving the same purpose were state aid subventions comprised of equivalent sums of money turned over to the commission by the Belgian government for the purpose of meeting the financial obligations of citizens and institutions within Belgium. Funding from the government went to benevolent institutions (beyond the commission), pensions,

<sup>239</sup> *New York Times*, Jul 17, 1921, p. 1.

<sup>240</sup> Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 1:6. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 205. Provincial relief committees also received regular monthly subsidies from the Comité National. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 83-84. Loc cit, p. 206.

separation allowances, salaries of civil servants, etc. In total these sources expended over \$558,000,000 for the care of the destitute in Belgium.<sup>241</sup>

Throughout the war Belgians expressed a tremendous debt of gratitude to the commission for the gifts of benevolence they received from various sources around the world. The provincial offices of the CRB were literally filled with souvenirs for the American people testifying to Belgian gratefulness. Most touching and original to Edward Eyre Hunt were the finely embroidered tributes made from American flour sacks. Their needlework read “Homage to America,” “Thanks to America,” “Out of Gratitude to America,” “Grateful Belgium to Kind America,” “To the Savior of Belgium,” or in simple Flemish or French, “Thanks.” Letters from Belgian children struck a similar chord with commission representatives. Every child in the town of Tamise wrote a letter that was given to Hunt so it could be sent to America. Nine-year-old Jozef Segleras wrote, “If I had a flying machine I would fly to America to thank the brave people there. I haven’t one, so I write a little letter, and I tell you that I shall pray very much for you and never forget you.” An unsigned letter from a girl about ten years old said, “I often saw Mother weep when we came downstairs in the morning, because she could not give us the bread we asked for, because there was no flour. But you have dried her tears with the good flour which you have sent.”<sup>242</sup>

In conducting its business the CRB employed a business hierarchy akin to many of the top corporations in America. Indeed many of the strategies and structures outside of the commune used by the commission were rooted in American business practice and staffed by men with commercial experience. At the same time there were other reasons why Americans were well-suited for positions as CRB functionaries. Delegates were almost exclusively Americans

<sup>241</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:311. Loc cit, p. 1:126. Loc cit, p. 2:311.

<sup>242</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 229. Loc cit, p. 230. Loc cit, p. 231. Loc cit, p. 233.

because no other neutral power had sufficient prestige or could furnish a sufficient number of the right type of men necessary to make ravitaillement successful. Spain and Holland gave support through diplomats and carried on the work after America's entrance into the war; but from October 1914 through Aug 1919 the commission was essentially an American organization.<sup>243</sup>

At the top of this hierarchy was Chairman Herbert Hoover. Serving below him during the CRB's first year of operation were the commission's directors that included Lindon Wallace Bates (director in the U.S.), John Beaver White (head of shipping and purchasing), C.A. Young (director in Holland), J.F. Lucey (director in Holland and Belgium), Millard Hunsiker (director in Great Britain), Oscar Crosby (director in Belgium), Daniel Heineman (director in Belgium), and Albert N. Connett (director in Belgium). Working in conjunction with Hoover and his directors was the commission's executive committee that included the additional personnel of Don Jose Congosto, Millard K. Shaler, Edgar T. Rickard, William Hulse, Robert P. Skinner, Edgar Sengier, Hugh S. Gibson, Marshall Langhorne, Herbert R. Eldridge, Perrin Galpin, J.A. Nash, G. Nauta, and L. Van den Branden. Added to this group were Honorary Secretaries Shaler (in London), Rickard (in London), Hulse (in Brussels), Robert McCarter (in New York), Galpin (in Brussels), E.D. Curtis (in Brussels, and Honorary Treasurer A.J. Hemphill (in New York).<sup>244</sup>

Beyond this core group of executives, the CRB was staffed by a large contingent of representatives around the world. At the administrative level in the U.S. there were on average

<sup>243</sup> Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 1:7.

<sup>244</sup> Californians played a key role in the administration of the CRB. Among executive and delegates, Edgar Rickard, Prentiss Grey, Warren Gregory, Walter Brown, and A.C.B. Fletcher were University of California alums. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 1:8. Hoover and Vernon Kellogg were Stanford products, while Captain J.F. Lucey was a Californian by residence. Ibid, 1:8. The London Times, *History of the War*, p. 443. Commission members held multiple positions during the CRB's period of operations (1914-1915). For instance, Edgar Rickard served as an Honorary Secretary in London from October 1914-1915, Assistant Director in London in late 1915, Assistant Director in New York from 1916 to November 1918, and Director in New York from November 1918 through December 1919. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 1:9. Rickard served as one of Hoover's right hand men in the CRB London office for over a year (1914-1915). According to T.B. Kittredge the value of the services he rendered would be difficult to overestimate. After America entered the war Hoover summoned Rickard to assist his efforts with the U.S. Food Administration of which he (Rickard) was one of the heads. After the Armistice, Rickard was the practical head of the Food Administration in Hoover's absence. Loc cit, p. 2:54.

(including personnel and supervising staff) 55 employees on staff at all times. Below them were a contingent of nearly 2,000 committee scattered throughout across the globe. In the occupied territories under the three separate principal committees handling ravitaillement (the CRB, Comité National and Comité Français) there were nearly 5,000 separate groups dealing with food supplies and an almost equal number dispensing charity. In the U.S. an estimated 50,000 people were directly associated with appeals (charity) through state, city, and special committees. Within the British Empire (including Canada) an additional 26,500 individuals participated in the appeals process. Within the communes, nearly 40,000 people participated in work of the Comité National and its subsidiaries while 15,000 worked with the Comité Français and its subgroups. In total approximately 131,555 people participated in relief organizations. One demand issued by Chairman Hoover was common among all whom participated in relief: that all who serve in it be swallowed up by the organization and be forgotten in service to Belgium.<sup>245</sup>

Among the most important members of the commission were its delegates—the individuals who performed the actual service of ravitaillement while providing a vital link between the committees and CRB administration. The work of delegates fell into four main phases: general duties, maintaining guarantees, coordinating/monitoring transportation, and keeping detailed statistics. According to the commission the most important function of the delegate were to maintain neutrality in the provinces and to exemplify its ideals in constantly rendering aid and moral support to the people and to care for the destitute. In the commission's view absolute neutrality in word and act, vigilance and firmness in guarding the interests of the population, and tact in official duties by delegates were essential to the success of ravitaillement. Nevertheless, it was a position difficult to sustain for the delegates. To Hoover, "(preserving)

<sup>245</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:466. U.S. committees were also formed in Hawai'i and the Philippines. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 185.

absolute neutrality was difficult enough for me and all the American members of the commission because of our sense of outrage at the German invasion of a helpless people and the barbarities to which they were subjected.” Eyre Hunt understood that he was “honor bound” to know what became of every item of supply because it was only on terms like these that Britain would modify its blockade for Belgium.<sup>246</sup>

An important part of protecting neutrality was protecting the delegate and vice versa. In an attempt to do both the commission decided that all food should be considered property of the CRB under the nominal control of the delegate until it was distributed to the consumer. Reportedly Hoover repeatedly stressed that “There is only one way in which you American delegates can do your duty, and that is by ignoring the war. You are only stewards of grain, of bacon, and of dried peas. It is your business to see that they arrive safely, to count and weigh them accurately, and to make sure that they reach the mouths for which they were intended.” Under this system the business of the delegate was to attend to the reception of all merchandise shipped by the CRB to his district and to control/transfer supplies to the Comité Provincial under the conditions and in the manner specified. In dealing with Germans during this process the relationship between the delegate and the German authority was to be purely one of “friendly intermediary.”<sup>247</sup>

Diversity of experience among the ranks of commission representatives necessitated the CRB to take clear process and position of delegates. Frequent changes in personnel and the reality that not every agent proved up to the task demanded the creation of a framework with

<sup>246</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:70. Loc cit, p. 1:28. Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 1:25. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 209.

<sup>247</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 181. Taillandier, *The Soul of the “CRB,”* p. 123. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 95. In addition to keeping meticulous track of every provision that entered a delegate’s commune, the representative was compelled to observe his province and report on these matters regularly to CRB administration in Belgium and to the American Minister (Brand Whitlock). Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 209. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:71.

expectations and benchmarks for performance. Working in most cases as volunteers the delegates were from all sorts of professions including engineers, businessmen, lawyers, doctors, clergymen, and students. Colleges were equally important contributors to the commission supplying delegates from Amherst, Dartmouth, Georgetown, Kansas, MIT, Michigan, Arizona, Alabama, Pomona College, West Point, Minnesota, Gettysburg, Western Reserve, Indiana, Wisconsin, Virginia, Rutgers, North Dakota, Nevada, Texas, Nebraska, RPI, Maine, Illinois, Wofford, Haverford, Colorado, Utah, Penn State, Brown, and Lehigh.<sup>248</sup>

As volunteers commission delegates received little and were demanded much. Directors and delegates received allowances to cover actual expenses instead of salaries. Hoover personally paid the expenses of these volunteer delegates out of pocket to the tune of approximately \$35,000 a year. According to William C. Edgar the unpaid work of volunteer delegates kept commission costs small and in his view this savings was “probably unparalleled in this respect by any charitable organization in the world.” It was well known that volunteers could not continue the work for long periods of time and remain in good spirits and health. To alleviate personal strain the chairman also arranged a series of vacations for delegates. For Edward Eyre Hunt the crossing of the border into Holland for these holidays was like a “spiritual experience.”<sup>249</sup>

<sup>248</sup> Definite instructions given to delegates did not mean that their actions were completely proscribed by administrative mandates. Edward Eyre Hunt reported that as an American delegate his duties were ill-defined but were capable of almost unlimited extension. Representative of the duties of many delegates, Hunt was in theory the owner of all supplies imported to the province of Antwerp from the time they arrived on canal boats to the time they were consumed by Belgians. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 208-209. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:91. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 4. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 1:8.

<sup>249</sup> Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 1:8. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:240. This out of pocket figure does not include lost income forfeited by Hoover when for the sake of neutrality he sacrificed his position as director in several British companies. On the subject of Hoover paying for CRB expenses personally, Whitlock commented that the Belgians, even of the committee give him no credit for doing so and never mention his name if they can help it. What was worse, Villalobar hated him despite everything Hoover was risking. *North London Guardian*, Jul 31, 1915. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 263.

A group of volunteers that attracted particular attention were the American Rhodes Scholars. Ten “Rhodesters” departing for Belgium on December 3, 1914 were part of the first flood of young Americans eager to assist the commission in any way they could. Initially, they were told that their duties would include protecting food from Germans, riding on freight trains and canal barges, and roughing it in a devastated country amid all sorts of dangers and difficulties. The job was made all the more difficult when the first batch arrived in Brussels on December 7 and the CRB office didn’t know what to do with them. Nevertheless their young, fearless, energetic attitudes and initiative quickly inspired confidence in the committees that at first looked at them as rookies.<sup>250</sup>

One of the best tributes to the efficiency of the Rhodesters was the fact that food supplies were being distributed in every province and in almost every village within six weeks of their arrival in Belgium. Whitlock commented that the Rhodes Scholar volunteers worked for no reward other than the satisfaction of helping a great humanitarian cause. He added that the work of the commission could never have been done without them. “I suppose the world has never seen anything quite like their devotion,” Whitlock continued, “it use to amuse, when it did not exasperate us, to see the Germans so mystified by it; they could not understand it and were always trying to find out the real reason for their being there.”<sup>251</sup>

<sup>250</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 90 and Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 220. Edward Eyre Hunt recognized Bennett H. Branscomb and Oliver C. Carmichael of Oxford as the first American Rhodes scholars to participate in Belgian relief. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 93.

<sup>251</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 93. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:409.

## CHAPTER SIX: *Funding the “2,500 Mile Long Breadline”*

### Two Leading Figures at the Fore: Herbert Hoover and Brand Whitlock

A distinguished career in engineering and business management prepared Hoover for the task of directing Belgian relief. A commitment to science and scientific principles was a part of his character since his days of youth. Hoover recalled about his childhood in Oregon that he was “determined to become an engineer.” As a young man he also developed a keen eye for business and bookkeeping. In the following years these skills overshadowed any aspirations he had for other potential careers. His organizational zeal first became evident when he switched from being the shortstop on Stanford’s baseball team to manager. Serving as the squad’s *de facto* athletic director, Hoover arranged games, met operating expenses, raised money, and collected gate receipts. Shortly afterward he was also asked to help the school’s football team. In 1892 he assisted in organizing a game with the University of California that was attended by 20,000 people yielding a gate of over \$30,000. In addition to his work with athletics Hoover was elected the school’s first student financial manger as a senior. Foreshadowing his future commitment to open books and financial reporting, Hoover set up a full system of accounts for all student enterprises and published them regularly in the college paper.<sup>252</sup>

Hoover’s interest in finance followed him from Stanford after graduation in 1895. He frankly recalled that after leaving college “I needed at once to find person with a profit motive who needed me to help him earn a profit.” Initially Hoover’s career found him working as a laborer in California despite his college degree. After pushing a car inside the Reward Mine near Nevada City, CA for \$2 a day working ten-hour shifts for seven days a week he became the

<sup>252</sup> Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:14. Loc cit, p. 1:21. Loc cit, p. 1:22. In a display of an aversion for simple charity that would later become a critical component of his work with Belgian relief, he refused to take a personal donation of 50 cents from former President Benjamin Harrison for purchased baseball tickets. Loc cit, p. 1:23.



personal assistant of engineer Louis Janin. It was through Janin that Hoover came in contact with the British mining firm of Bewick, Moreing, and Company who were searching for an engineer skilled in American gold mining practices for a job in Australia.<sup>253</sup>

Hoover began his employment as a general engineer for a group of ten mines and a number of prospecting ventures for Bewick, Moreing, and Company in October 1897. His base of operations was the desert mining town of Coolgardie, Australia located some 350 miles east of Perth. After two months of work Hoover took stock of the operation and instituted a set four reforms that reduced costs by 53 percent. The following year he was named manager of the Sons of Gwalia mining interest the company recently acquired under Hoover's advice. A report issued by Bewick, Moreing in August of 1898 announced that under his management the mine had substantially reduced its working costs. In three months the mine generated a profit of £1,638 through economies of scale, lower wages, longer hours, and a reorganization of company personnel. As manager few questioned whether Hoover was earning his \$10,000 a year salary. During his nearly seven months on the site he wrote more than 600 letters detailing the mine's operations.<sup>254</sup>

In March 1899, Hoover arrived on assignment in China as the Chief Engineer for a large cement and coalmining interest named the "Chinese Engineering and Mining Company." Resuming his now familiar role as reorganizer, he instituted wide-ranging reforms in finance including the stipulation that none of the company's funds were to be distributed without his personal authorization as the company's temporary general manger in early 1901. One of the greatest challenges Hoover faced as manager was dealing with the Chinese business practice of

<sup>253</sup> Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:25. Loc cit, p. 1:25 and 27. Hoover graduated with an A.B. in Geology in May 1895. Loc cit, p. 1:28. Hoover helped Janin with a major mining/engineering project in Northern Colorado.

<sup>254</sup> Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:53. In 1896 the total population of the entire area of Western Australia was 138,000. Coolgardie had a population of 8,000. Loc cit, p. 1:54. Loc cit, p. 1:60. Loc cit, p. 1:77-78. The reorganization of company personnel was achieved primarily through layoffs. Loc cit, p. 1:78.

“squeeze” (known as graft in nineteenth century American terminology). In analyzing the finances of the Chinese Engineering and Mining Company he discovered that about 6,000 names of the alleged 25,000 employed by the firm were fictitious. To combat the problem, Hoover set up a parallel structure of his “own men” in every department. By reducing squeeze alone the company turned a losing venture into a profit of \$150,000 Mexican in 90 days. His seven months as manager revealed not only his talents as a negotiator and battlefield technician but also a brilliant ability in administration and organization. For his efforts Bewick, Moreing, and Company made Hoover a junior partner after he resigned from the Chinese venture later that fall. He was twenty-seven years old.<sup>255</sup>

With a twenty percent share in the company, Hoover’s job as junior partner was to operate the mines as both an engineer and an administrator. In his day-to-day duties Hoover became responsible for the technical, engineering aspects of their reorganization efforts. Over the next few years he concentrated his efforts increasingly on improving the company’s mining interests throughout Western Australia. To assure performance and diminish costs he sent for fifteen university-trained managers, metallurgists, and mechanical engineers from the United States. In a move that would be replicated in Belgium during WWI, Hoover also established stronger systems of inspection under the control of a central office and consolidated the purchase of supplies into one office. Once in place the reformed program of organization reduced costs by 40 percent.<sup>256</sup>

<sup>255</sup> Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:161. Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:62. Loc cit, p. 1:63. By June 1901, Hoover and associates had already discovered more than \$1,500,000 in misappropriated “squeeze.” Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:166. Loc cit, p. 1:178.

<sup>256</sup> Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:74. By the end of 1902, Hoover increased his share in Bewick, Moreing, and Company to 30 percent. Loc cit, p. 1:85. Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:225. Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:78. After reorganization the mines of Bewick, Moreing, and Company improved production to approximately 500,000 tons of ore per year valued at between \$8-9 million. Nearly 2,000 men were employed in the operation. Loc cit, p. 1:78.

Both scientific and economic motivations contributed to Hoover's relentless drive for efficiency and lower costs at Bewick, Moreing, and Company. Under a typical contract they were obligated to operate the venture at a specified level above net profits. Under Hoover's direction lower overhead costs meant greater profits for the company. Hoover in 1903 pointed out in an article he wrote that successful mining firms shared the common characteristics of specialized partners, strong field organizations, and competent general staffs at each mine headed by capable engineers with assistants trained in metallurgy, accounting, secretarial work, and other important skills. He added that in an ideal organizational structure each individual mine would operate independently with its own managerial team working under the supervision of the firm's general administration. Later that year Hoover bragged that his own company searched the world over for talented individuals and promoted men for proven efficiency.<sup>257</sup>

Honesty was another virtue that Hoover was becoming known for. Another of the major reforms pursued by Bewick, Moreing was the drive to eradicate fraud and the establishment of public rapport. Pursuant to this goal the firm introduced the custom of opening its mines up twice a month for public inspection in 1903. A journalist commenting on the move called it refreshing in contrast to the "idiotic policy of secrecy" still popular among many mining firms. The reporter added that Hoover's company in particular was acquiring a reputation for thoroughness and precision in its mining studies and its willingness to make those reports available to the public.<sup>258</sup>

In 1908 Hoover sold his share in Bewick, Moreing to W.L. Loring for more than \$150,000 and retired from the business. During his six and a half years as a partner the firm's business tripled. At the time of his departure the company operated forty-five mining concerns

<sup>257</sup> Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:226. Loc cit, p. 1:277. Loc cit, p. 1:277-278. Loc cit, p. 1:278.

<sup>258</sup> Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:281.

with an annual distribution of £895,000 in wages to its representative companies around the world. In Western Australia alone the firm's mines produced approximately 1,000,000 tons of ore per year valued at \$18,000,000. Despite the impressive gains, Hoover surmised that the company's output (and profits) had peaked and it was time to move on. With the money made through the sale of his share of the business and through his growing income as a "financial expert," Hoover entered retirement worth more than \$400,000 in mid-1908.<sup>259</sup>

Retirement for Hoover allowed him sufficient time to develop his personal engineering and business interests as a mining consultant and venture capitalist. In 1908 he set up an organization with offices in New York, San Francisco, London (in the location that the CRB would later call home), Petrograd, and Paris. Working in association with a group of young, skilled engineers, Hoover and associates operated under the assumption that there would be numerous sound engineering projects to undertake because many ventures used out of date methods that yielded little or no profits. Under his leadership the group's goal was to bring their clients operations up-to-date and manage them efficiently in return for a fair share of the profits. Both Hoover and outside observers called the group "engineering doctors to sick mines." Once competent management was instituted within a firm the "youngsters" took over the details while Hoover increasingly focused on locating and financing new mining propositions.<sup>260</sup>

In his new, private venture Hoover brought the mindset of an engineer to the world of finance. Mining promotion in particular was an industry wrought with ignorance and scandal. Hoover's goal was to reform people's perceptions by bringing trained, scientific intelligence to the business world. In doing so he firmly believed that there were clear differences between the

<sup>259</sup> Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:381. Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:98 and Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:381. Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:382. In 1907, Hoover told David Starr Jordan (President of Stanford University) that as a partner in Bewick, Moreing he was making \$5,000 a year as a mining expert and \$95,000 a year as a financial expert. Loc cit, p. 1:378.

<sup>260</sup> Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:99. Loc cit, p. 1:100. Loc cit, p. 1: 100 and Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:385.

professional speculator who could determine the accurate value of a mine and then provide means for obtaining capital and the scoundrels who searched for mere profit. Mine valuation and finance was a risky business. Hoover traversed this difficult industry by applying rationality and expertise to his work.<sup>261</sup>

By the early 1910s, Hoover was involved in an ever-diversifying range of undertakings. One of his most ambitious projects began in 1910 with the transformation of mining operations on the Kyshtim estate near Ekaterinburg, Russia. After reorganization the property produced over 25,000,000 pounds of copper each year alongside other ores at an annual net profit of \$2,000,000. Shifting his attentions elsewhere, Hoover also became a member of the Board of Trustees at Stanford in 1912. Upon accepting the volunteer position he instituted a program aimed at making some “long needed changes,” including the first publication of the school’s financial records. In the two years immediately precluding war, Hoover’s business interests ranged oil in California to coal Wales. As tensions began rising throughout Europe in 1914, Hoover was in London working on the reorganization of the mining interests of the Panama-Pacific Exposition. Observers commented that Hoover was capable, self confident, aggressive, combative, clever, and unconcerned with obstacles. Working tirelessly on the Panama-Pacific project he appeared to be exhilarated by the exercise of power and behind the scenes maneuvering. When war began Hoover handed technical control of the project over to his staff and began working to assist Americans stranded in Europe.<sup>262</sup>

<sup>261</sup> Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:394. Loc cit, p. 1:391.

<sup>262</sup> Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:103. Loc cit, p. 1:119. Hoover after reviewing the accounts concluded that the school could not expand unless it started charging students tuition. The recommendation was unpopular among the students. As a trustee he also donated \$100,000 to Stanford for the building of a student union on the condition that the school provided an additional \$150,000 of its own funds for the project. Loc cit, p. 1:120. Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:558. As was the case in many other instances, Hoover was also determined to have things his way. Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:115. When World War I began, Hoover’s engineering practice included projects in the US, Canada, Mexico, Chile, China, Russia, Mongolia, Burma, Penang, New Zealand, and Australia. Loc cit, p. 1:115-116.

Hoover's work as an engineer, financier, and soon-to-be coordinator of Belgian relief solidified his personal commitments to individualism, voluntary cooperation, and cooperative capitalism. To Hoover, American individualism manifested itself in individual initiative, freedom of opportunity, and self-expression. Within the drive for individual initiative and self-expression, Hoover found voluntary cooperation as a vital link between personal interests and the greater success of society. From his vantage point as a scientist and engineer, Hoover recognized the economic and technological advantages offered by voluntary cooperation among the multifold groups that comprised modern society. In a similar manner, voluntary cooperation offered benefits to both society and the individual in the form of gains in equality of opportunity, and an enlarged field for individual initiative while at the same time reducing the waste of reckless competition among production and consumption factors. Voluntary cooperation, so it seemed to Hoover, would promote efficiency, stability, and market development without resorting to excessive government regulation or the institution of state capitalism. In his work, Hoover became known as an exact and quantitative thinker with a zeal for efficiency and a flexibility that encouraged cautious and orderly change arising from voluntary cooperation rather than legislation.<sup>263</sup>

Voluntarism as a source of public service played a vital role in the administration of programs that served community needs. By playing upon a common sense of pride and character, voluntarism functioned for Hoover as an informal means of social control among a diverse set of individuals working within voluntary agencies. In finding common ground between members of an organization, voluntarism was designed to resolve tensions inevitable in

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<sup>263</sup> Huthmacher, J. Joseph and Susman, Warren I. (Ed.). *Herbert Hoover and the Crisis of Capitalism*. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1973, p. 98. Loc cit, p. 99. Loc cit, p. 101. Hogan, Michael. "The U.S. and the problem of International Economic Control: American Attitudes Towards European Reconstruction, 1918-1920." *Pacific Historical Review*, (Feb, 1975): 84-103, p. 90. Dorfman, Joseph. *The Economic Mind in American Civilization: Vol. 4 1918-1933*. (New York: Viking Press, 1959) p. 4:28.

decentralized administrative practices. In the case of the CRB, the ideology endeavored to close off questions about the ambiguities and contradictions that emerged in practice surrounding polarities including decentralization-centralization, civilian-state, and private-public spheres.<sup>264</sup>

In the business environments of America after 1890, a sense of cooperative capitalism was an important component of protecting individual initiative from governmental intervention. Hoover maintained that, “Progress is born of cooperation in the community—not from governmental restraints. Business has by cooperation made great progress in the advancement of service, in stability, in regularity of employment, and in the correction of its own abuses.” Regulation preventing the restriction of trade was paramount to the economic success of United States because it preserved the equality of opportunity in American markets. To Hoover cooperation was not socialism, but the initiative of self-interest blended with a sense of service. Applying lessons from both his Quaker upbringing and his experience as an engineer, Hoover blended voluntary cooperation and individualism into his own version of cooperative capitalism.<sup>265</sup>

Hoover approached his position as director of the CRB from the perspective of an engineer-financier. He claimed that by bringing efficiency to society the modern intellectual engineer assumed a new, important role in the modern industrial order by creating peace and prosperity. Engineers, he claimed, performed the “job of clothing the bare bones of science with life, comfort, and hope.” Hoover observed that within his lifetime the discipline of engineering transformed from a trade into a profession that dealt with the “sort of exactness (that) makes for truth and conscience.” In his professional life Hoover described himself as a scientifically-trained professional with the independence, disinterestedness, and ethics of an expert. A

<sup>264</sup> Cuff, Robert D. “The Ideology of Voluntarism and War Organization During the Great War.” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (Sept, 1977): 358-372, p. 363. Loc cit, p. 365.

<sup>265</sup> Huthmacher and Susman, *Herbert Hoover and the Crisis of Capitalism*, p. 102. Loc cit, p. 101.

colleague commented that one of Hoover's outstanding traits was that he never complained about anything and did not make the mistake of thinking his rank conferred omniscience.<sup>266</sup>

Hoover sternly disliked ostentation in any form. In public he abhorred attention that focused too directly on him or appeared to be overtly self-serving. While Hoover loved to engineer publicity he shrank from personal accolades to the point that he was averse to having his picture taken for public use. The traits of his thoroughly Quaker upbringing were evident in both his personal and professional life. Hoover in his dealings abhorred over self-aggrandizement and display. As a manager he hated idle gossip and was quiet and direct in speech.<sup>267</sup>

Fellow administrators, delegates, and committee members alike credited Hoover with possessing the organizational ingenuity and ability that kept ravitaillement going in Belgium and Northern France for the better part of five years. In performing his duties he maintained that the value of any administrative effort ultimately depended on the extent to which an individual can develop an institution to carry on the work at hand. The precision by which the chairman conducted CRB business was particularly noticeable to his peers. Madame Taillandier commented that the look of intelligence in Hoover's face was like that of a surgeon. Vernon

<sup>266</sup> Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:489. Hoover added that engineering was not a science; it was the application of science to industry, and industry itself was governed by economic calculations. Loc cit, p. 1:486. Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:133. Loc cit, p. 1:131 and 132. In 1912, Hoover told a friend that the highest form of engineer was a man who not only could handle the technical aspects of the work but also could organize, manage, and finance it. Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:411. He firmly believed that the engineer in society performed many essential public functions. Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:133-134. To Hoover the engineer was both an economic and a social force. Loc cit, p. 1:134. Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:475. As a partner in Bewick, Moreing he worked to "reeducate himself" through a program of history, government, politics, economics, and sociology. Hoover claimed that between 1904 and 1908 he literally read several thousand books. Loc cit, p. 1:292. His sense of professionalism was also evident in his placement of more than thirty signed articles and letters to the editor and more than a dozen unsigned or pseudonymous pieces that appeared in British and American publications. Loc cit, p. 1:476. Between 1902 and 1904 he wrote at least nine pseudonymous contributions to the *Financial Times*. Loc cit, p. 1:288. The colleague was W.L. Loring (Hoover sold his interest in Bewick, Moreing to Loring in 1908). Loc cit, p. 1:291-292.

<sup>267</sup> Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 1:289. Nevertheless, Hoover was keenly aware of the power and usefulness of the press. Loc cit, p. 1:288. Loc cit, p. 1:572. Loc cit, p. 1:572-573.



Kellogg added that with all his training in the industry of engineering and his experience in business the chairman looked on the U.S. not simply as a nation of fields, factories, mines, railways, motor cars, and steamships but as a nation of men, women, and children.<sup>268</sup>

Hoover also possessed an eye for detail and a mind for aspects of relief efforts that many failed to consider. In the first year of the war for example he stressed the peculiar relation between a sufficiency of fats in the national diet and the contentment and courage of the people. Studies revealed that the human body experiences a psychological and physiological need for fatty foods which leads in cases of fat reduction to nervousness, helplessness, and discontent. Regardless of the situation, Hoover stressed the importance of the commission in the lives of Belgians. “An intolerable wrong is being committed in the world, and we cannot allow it. It is true we have neither the traditions nor the habits of a military nation; we shall not feel the war in our body and our blood, but we shall feel it in our souls, and our action will be all the more rapid.”<sup>269</sup>

Another commonly observed feature of Hoover was his demeanor. Edward Eyre Hunt observed that the chairman was astonishingly youthful with cool eyes, clear brow, and full mouth. At work Hoover appeared to be passive and receptive; Hunt observed that there were times when he was “so silent that it hurt.” As an American he displayed a proclivity towards acting first and explaining afterward. But his explanations, like his actions, were direct and self-sufficient.<sup>270</sup>

In his leadership of the commission Hoover applied a no-nonsense approach to his dealings with everyone from rank-and-file commune members to heads of state. Vernon Kellogg

<sup>268</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2. Taillandier, *The Soul of the “CRB,”* p. 173. Kellogg, *Herbert Hoover As His Friends See Him*, p. 2.

<sup>269</sup> Baker, George Barr. *The Great Fat Fight*. Washington, DC: Republican National Committee, 1928, p. 3. George Barr Baker credited the reduction of fats in diets of Germany and Austria as an increasingly critical factor in the collapse from within that helped end the war. Taillandier, *The Soul of the “CRB,”* p. 232.

<sup>270</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 193.

explained that the chairman was an organizational man who as a leader was not the dictator type. He depended on the mobilization of every agency that could help and sought the cooperation of everyone who could be of assistance. As director of relief efforts, Kellogg believed that Hoover had that primary sense of organization that led to the proper delegation of authority. “Above all he inspires ideals of service in every member of the vast staffs which he builds almost overnight for his great enterprises of mercy,” Kellogg added.<sup>271</sup>

In conducting business Hoover also had a talent for concentrating on the most critical aspects of the situation. His habit of going straight to the highest authority with anything allowed for quicker, more decisive, and influential decision making. When he wanted an obstacle removed from his path, the chairman went directly to the man who could remove it or excised the issue himself.<sup>272</sup>

By the course of his actions and the directness of his tactics Hoover made enemies. Edward Eyre Hunt wondered how there were so few adversaries considering his boldness. In forging the commission Hoover used men, threw them aside, and forgot them as any architect does. Hunt observed that Hoover had along with his diplomatic skill a frank way of dealing with men as well as he dealt with conditions. These skills made him a diplomat in the high—not trivial—sense of the word and a constructive artist in human destiny. The chairman was a leader too busy to waste time flattering the petty pride of those he led or negotiated with. Whitlock himself told stories of the “terrible Hoover” heading the commission in Belgium who was terrible to the Germans, terrible to the British and French, terrible to most of his American associates, and terrible because of his relentless and unconquerable determination to keep Belgium alive. In his dealings the chairman scolded, threatened, and out-bullied every human

<sup>271</sup> Kellogg, *Herbert Hoover As His Friends See Him*, p. 14.

<sup>272</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 197.

obstacle and by the course of his actions changed the policies of nations and thwarted the resolute determination of cabinets, governments, and military establishments. It was from these attributes that Hoover commanded the respect of others. “Listen to no one but Chief Hoover,” Horace Fletcher explained in a letter to fellow commission members, “it is he who is managing this miracle on the loaves and the fishes and who is reconstructing Golden Rule practical Christianity on solid (engineering) lines.”<sup>273</sup>

Brand Whitlock was himself an important asset to Hoover and the commission in his role of directing relief once it arrived in Belgium. Unlike the chairman, Whitlock brought with him extensive experience in politics and diplomacy acquired before the war. Born in Urbana, Ohio in 1869, Whitlock observed justice at its worst as a newspaper reporter in Chicago early in his career. In 1905 his professional career as a lawyer changed when Lincoln Steffens persuaded him to run for the mayor in Toledo, Ohio. Nominated on an independent ticket, Whitlock was swept into office. With the election of Woodrow Wilson to the Presidency in 1912, Mayor Whitlock retired voluntarily to secure an opportunity to pursue his literary ambitions by becoming an American diplomat. In December 1913, Whitlock replaced Theodore Marburg as American Minister to Belgium. Whitlock looked forward to enjoying the culture of the “Little Paris” of Europe and its assured peace guaranteed by treaties among its neighbors.<sup>274</sup>

The outbreak of war tested the will of the American Minister. Newton Baker observed of Whitlock that he had never in his life been neutral between right and wrong—dating back to his days as a reporter in Chicago and as Mayor of Toledo—and did not try to be impartial when he was in Belgium. Baker believed that the minister was better than neutral because of his espousal

<sup>273</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 197. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 1:xvii. CRB NY Regular Meeting Minutes, addendum letter, Friday February 25, 1916 at 3:00pm. Herbert Hoover Presidential Library Archives (microfilm): Commission for Relief in Belgium, New York office committee minutes and agenda, November 1915–November 1918.

<sup>274</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 1:xxiii, ix. Loc cit, p. 1:xxxvii. Loc cit, p. 1:xvi. Loc cit, p. 1:lv. Loc cit, p. 1:xvi.

of a lofty moral philosophy and elevated idealism. Nevertheless, Whitlock had to suppress his feelings and be painfully neutral as an organizer of ravitaillement efforts. His tenure in Brussels once the war erupted depended on his neutrality especially after the Belgian government fled to The Havre. Baker believed that despite his outward disposition the people of Belgium never failed to divine his opinion of the war and never ceased to regard him as a stone wall between helplessness and the harshness of the German occupying forces.<sup>275</sup>

In carrying out his duties the minister was relentless in his dedication to Belgians. For a time Whitlock personally arrived at the Brussels markets at five a.m. to see that the German commissariat was not stripping them clean. In total his greatest service in the first dark months of the war was that he showed the frightened population that someone cared. As time passed the minister's popularity grew alongside his reputation. In November 1915, J.F. Lucey found Whitlock to be the most powerful figure in Belgium as far as the people were concerned. "The Belgians hold (for) him a reverence and affection as great as that which they entertain their heroic King," Lucey added. Many people, Germans included, owed their lives to the courage and tactfulness of Whitlock according to Lucey. King Albert conferred the highest decoration of the country (the grand cordon of the Order of Leopold) upon Whitlock after the conclusion of the war. At the conclusion of the Armistice he was awarded the Croix Civique and made a Burgess of Brussels, Liège, and Ghent.<sup>276</sup>

### **Funding Necessities in Belgium**

By late 1914 it became clear that the modest funds that the commission currently possessed were wholly and woefully inadequate to meet the ever-growing needs of Belgium.

<sup>275</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 1:xix. Loc cit, p. 1:lix.

<sup>276</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 1:lix. Loc cit, 1:lvii. *New York Times*, Nov 5, 1915, p. 3. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 1:lx. Whitlock was also made an honorary citizen of Antwerp.

The CRB agreed that its benevolent funding was, and never could be, sufficient under current levels to gratuitously distribute all of its supplies. In August 1915, Hoover reported to Lindon Bates at the CRB New York office that the commission had abandoned its appeals everywhere except in the most critical phases because there no longer appeared to be a legitimate undercurrent of support for relief in America. The only legitimate appeal at the time seemed to be for food, money, and clothing—any other basis for appeal was subject to refutation as dishonest and would lead to criticism.<sup>277</sup>

Financial support for the CRB had two problems at the time—it was inconsistent in its appearance and was seemingly never enough. In 1915 the commission was raising huge sums of money every month through charity, banks, and governments but it was barely enough to provide a back food ration that kept the “body and soul together.” The need in Belgium was great. Hoover explained to Baker that “We have got to bolster them by taking better care of their greatest need—their old fathers and mothers and their children—and by showing them that somebody in the world cares enough to keep them hopeful for the future.” Hoover worried about the rations provided to the people of Belgium that by his own admittance were entirely inadequate and barely enough to keep strong people alive.<sup>278</sup>

The inconsistent flow of charity to the CRB was in reality an old problem exacerbated by increasing destitution across Belgium. Hoover summed up the situation in a letter to Edward Grey on November 25, 1914 saying that the flow of charity was at best irregular and unreliable, while the commission was compelled to purchase considerable quantities of food to supplement donations just to keep the program alive. At the time some effort was being made by the Belgian government to assist in accumulating working capital that could be used to purchase foodstuffs

<sup>277</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 4. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:268-269. Loc cit, p. 2:269.

<sup>278</sup> Baker, *The Great Fat Fight*, p. 3.

for resale—but this only benefitted those who still had money. By the end of January 1915 the commission had taken “the gloomiest possible view of the ultimate future.” With the help that the commission endeavored to secure (which Hoover noted was rapidly growing beyond the reach of private philanthropy) and the financial agreements for loans the CRB made it hoped to be able to sustain relief through the end of March. Before that time, however, three new forces would intervene and make the situation worse. These forces include the rapid exhaustion of vegetable and meat supplies in Belgium, the addition of Northern France to ravitaillement efforts (bringing the total from 7,000,000 to 10,000,000 people), and the worsening of conditions that drove larger numbers to the soup kitchens. If these people were to be kept alive the commission would need fifteen million dollars worth of food per month from April to August 1915.<sup>279</sup>

Solving the financial puzzle of such a vast operation was one of the most difficult challenges that the CRB faced. Estimations made in 1914 calling for about \$5,000,000 per month grew into actual spending amounts of \$30,000,000 in 1918. Initially, Daniel Heineman believed that if the commission could arrange for a guaranteed government subvention of £400,000 per month with private charity paying for the rest the CRB could handle the situation. Belgium’s pre-war reliance on the importation of between 275,000 and 300,000 tons of cereals per month made matters worse. On November 4, 1914 the CRB calculated that the maintenance of a 10 ounce ration per day would cost at least between £800,000 and £1,000,000 over the next eight months. Hoover reported that the situation was far beyond charity and philanthropy—it called for a government guarantee of at least £400,000 to £500,000 per month.<sup>280</sup>

<sup>279</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:221. Loc cit, p. 1:237, Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 114. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:237-238. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 114.

<sup>280</sup> Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. 14. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 59. Heineman added that any additional financial obligations could be met through the resale of foodstuffs within Belgium, allowing the commission to “make up the margin.” Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:219. Between 1914 and 1917 the Belgian

To survive the commission would have to broaden its appeals through both private and public channels. Hoover reported to Lord Eustace Percy in London on January 6, 1915 that it cost the CRB about £1,200,000 a month to provide a minimum ration in Belgium with about £600,000 of that total coming from the portion of the population that can still pay for it. At the time about £400,000 a month was a “dead loss” going to the support of free canteens and soup kitchens. With the number of destitute on the rise the private subsidy of £100,000 a month given by the Rockefeller Foundation combined with other various charities was all the commission had to rely on. On February 11, Vice Chairman Lindon Bates told the *New York Times* that \$100,000 per day or nearly \$3,000,000 per month was needed to feed the destitute in Belgium. Within a few weeks Bates estimated that ravitaillement would require \$12,000,000 a month. He concluded, “Within a few months the breadlines will be 2,500 miles long, which would reach from New York to Salt Lake City.” Urgent appeals of this sort in America became standard practice throughout the war. In total over four and a half years of operation, Hoover estimated that the CRB shipped over 56,000,000 tons of supplies. Extended over a nine-year period of relief spanning both the conflict itself and the aftermath he estimated that the total value of assistance topped \$8,000,000,000. Of these totals, American contributions played a crucial role in the relief of Belgium and Northern France. Loans by the US government and the giving of over 211 charitable institutions accounted for more than \$7,450,000,000 in assistance.<sup>281</sup>

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daily ration of war-bread averaged about twelve ounces, varying at times with the abundance or scarcity of wheat. Kellogg, *Fighting Starvation in Belgium*, p. 162. Hoover reported to the Germans before the end of 1914 that the CRB required approximately 20 million marks per month to provision the population of Belgium. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 107.

<sup>281</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:225 and Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 111. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:225. *New York Times*, Feb 11, 1915, p. 3. Bates explained that this necessity totaled approximately \$30,000,000 a year—about the same rate of the annual appropriations for the Panama Canal. Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 3:526 and 528.

Spreading the financial necessity out among its recipients was proving increasingly ineffective however. In February 1915, the Comité National determined that about \$3,000,000 was needed for relief. Of that sum the communes were to assume one-third of the funds while the other two-thirds was to be raised from external sources. The *New York Times* reported that this meant that the “friends of Belgium” would have to supply \$2,000,000 per month. In August, Hoover reported that about £1,000,000 per month was being generated abroad to supply the communes combined with an additional £200,000 from communal taxation (the sale of foodstuffs to those who could pay). This sum amounted to a share of less than thirty centimes per day per person among the destitute. With the minimum upon which life could be preserved sitting at sixty centimes per day, it was evident to Hoover that the money currently available was merely supplemental to the £2,500,000 now required per month. In total during the first twelve months of operation (October 1914 to October 1915) the CRB expended £17,257,591 on the purchase of food and its delivery into Belgium.<sup>282</sup>

Planning out the exact details of funding was no easy task for the commission. At the center of all operations was a complicated financial system that handled the distribution of supplies. In Northern France scheme was even more complex given the three organizations that worked in conjunction with each other. As the intermediary between the CRB and the Comité Français the Comité National worked in each French district receiving relief. When supplies were received the Comité Français billed the Comité National for the materials. Immediately the Comité National turned around and re-billed the district committees of the Comité Français for supplies at the same price it was charged by the CRB. Through this interaction the CRB fixed a

<sup>282</sup> *New York Times*, Feb 16, 1915, p. 4. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:8. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 235.



maximum sale price for consumers which allowed enough of a margin to cover costs of transportation into the French communes.<sup>283</sup>

The financial methods of the Provisioning Department were of equal complexity. If there had been no economic or legal restraints on exchange the department would have been able to survive on a moderate supply of working capital. This was not the case however. Given the constriction of economic markets and the disappearance of all metallic currency inside Belgium it could only function as far as local currency could go. In effect the disappearance of hard (metallic) currency created a convertibility crisis—meaning that the only money that existed in the country was inconvertible local emergency currency issued by banks and municipalities. Compounding the issue was the Allies refusal to allow the securities to pass out of Belgium.<sup>284</sup>

In an attempt to remedy the situation the commission was able to obtain small concessions from belligerents allowing the CRB to accept gold values abroad for the payment of foodstuffs at a fixed rate of 25.40 Belgian francs to the pound inside Belgium. Although the Belgian exchange rate in Holland was quoted at a depreciated value of 25 percent the commission decided that maintaining the gold value was necessary. The CRB surmised that allowing food prices to rise uncompensated by any advance in wages would have added to the misery of the nation. This form of commercial exchange required no actual money to change hands because the food itself served as the medium of exchange.<sup>285</sup>

As a system the expense of ravitaillement was partially covered by gifts from abroad and partially by the surplus generated from the Benevolence Department. Generally the amount of money available from these resources was insufficient. To make up the difference the

<sup>283</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 155.

<sup>284</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:470. *The Economist*, Sep 4, 1915.

<sup>285</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:470. *The Economist*, Sep 4, 1915. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:470.

Provisioning Department used its operating funds to close to gap. These advances to the Benevolence Department were debited against the government subsidies set aside for the destitute by the commission. In an attempt to achieve better economy and close the gap between actual funds on hand and subsidies the Rotterdam office of the CRB set up its own finance company. The commission was also able to lower its bulk wheat expenses by approximately 60 percent—equaling about £500 to £650 a month—by purchasing four grain elevators within the city.<sup>286</sup>

The coordination of charity was a crucial component of commission's work given the fact that the success or failure of relief hinged in the CRB's ability to secure adequate funding. "The Mobilization of Charity" was the term used by the CRB to describe both the appeal it made for charity and the measures it took to turn the response into money. The *London Times* explained that the word "benevolence" was apt because it described the universal feelings of sympathy that were aroused by situation in Belgium and the technical term "mobilization" was true in that the commission used scientific, practical methods to enhance and utilize these feelings. In total the commission secured funds from four primary sources—government subsidies, commercial activities, world charity, and operating surpluses—amounting to \$894,797,150.40.<sup>287</sup>

Funds under each category were gathered from a variety of sources that were principally American, British, and Belgian in origin. The common denominator in the process was the coordination of all financial operations at Hoover's central office in London. The drive desire to take disparate operations and combine them into one functional system was a central tenet of

<sup>286</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:471. *Morning Post*, April 22, 1916.

<sup>287</sup> The London Times, *History of the War*, p. 455. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:474.

CRB organization. The acquisition, shipping, and distribution of relief supplies generally followed a basic pattern: procurement in North or South America, transshipment to warehouses in Rotterdam, and final transfer into the communes by way of Antwerp on river and canal boats (lighters).<sup>288</sup>

In the first stage of relief accumulation it was important for the commission to present to the world a vivid picture Belgian suffering through a wide propaganda campaign. In the early days of the war Hoover strongly believed that the story of Belgium had tremendous news value as a vehicle to create a public opinion in support of the commission's objectives. As time passed the story of Belgium naturally became common knowledge and of diminishing value. To the chairman the continued use of propaganda lacked the dignity apropos to the prestige the commission achieved and was becoming a source of resentment and embarrassment to the Germans. Eventually it was a tool that the CRB passed on to the local committees once the commission established an international reputation.<sup>289</sup>

Hoover held the view that decentralized publicity provided the strongest means of generating charity at the committee level. In doing so the CRB decided in mid-1915 to supply press material to the committees only. Hoover's idea at the time was to have the chairmen of all state committees cooperate with the commission's central press agency in forming a national body in support of the CRB. This did not mean that the commission was ceasing all press release material—it simply meant that the information was going to be disseminated to the local bodies for their use as opposed to broad based nationalized propaganda. In the early days of

<sup>288</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:90.

<sup>289</sup> Hoover to Bates (August 31, 1915), Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:269. In the early days of the commission, many of Hoover's personal contacts formed local committees to collect funds. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 61. Americans were willing and willing to hear the story of Belgium. The commission reported that any items about Belgium made good copy for the press in 1914. Loc cit, p. 39. Hoover to Bates (August 31, 1915), Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:269.

CRB press coverage the story centered on the plight of Belgium. As people steadily became aware of the horrible conditions within the country the commission transitioned its publicity towards generating charity and focusing on how individuals could become involved.<sup>290</sup>

The organization of appeals for public support was guided by a set of general policies that remained in use throughout the entire CRB period and were later adopted by the ARA (American Relief Administration) in Europe. Organized by Hoover, the commission announced a detailed program of need based on the reports of competent investigators in relation to the current resources available. When conditions in respect to needs or resourced changed the commission issued a new program. In the second phase the commission issued appeals through the press and cooperating committees consisting of a clear statement of need (free from hysterical exaggeration), the details of the program to be undertaken, previous accomplishments, and the methods to be employed. As a part of this program the commission made it clear that it would not dictate to the cooperating committees the methods they should employ in the solicitation of support. Once funds were received the commission employed what it called the “economic and efficient methods of large scale business operations” with careful and detailed accounting for all contributions before allocating them to the Provisioning Department.<sup>291</sup>

In October 1914 the commission decided that the best way to collect funds and arouse public opinion was to bring moral pressure through a systematic press campaign. Under the directorship of Hoover the venture had an immediate impact. Edward Eyre Hunt recalled that by the beginning of January 1915 all the world “knew” Hoover—knew that he was the person most responsible for the creation and maintenance of the CRB, knew that it he was trying to feed over

<sup>290</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:270. Hoover also proposed that the CRB would pay the out-of-pocket expenses for setting up the central support organization.

<sup>291</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:235. The first appeal called for 80,000 tons per month at a cost of \$5,000,000. Loc cit, p. 2:236. Loc cit, p. 2:237. An important part of this final process was securing the labor of volunteers. Loc cit, p. 2:236. Volunteer service allowed the CRB to lower costs at every step of the ravitaillement process.

7,000,000, knew that he was trying to enlist the sympathy of the world on their behalf, and knew that the commission and its volunteer staff were involved in a business with an annual turnover of almost \$100,000,000. In a call to voluntary arms, Hoover said, “The neutral world and future generations will lay the responsibility for the decimation of these people at the proper door, and no mixture of military reason and diplomatic excuse will cloud the issue.”<sup>292</sup>

People responded generously to the commission’s call for benevolence. During the first four months of operation (November 1914 to February 1915) the commission secured £3,600,000 from various sources. A CRB office assistant in London recalled that after the first days of November (1914) the “money came from everywhere.” Under Hoover the press appeal yielded committees in Britain, America, Australia, Japan, and China. Opening the mail at the CRB London office was reportedly like “the working of a magic spell; checks from all (quarters) of the globe were piled up in heaps.”<sup>293</sup>

Working extensively through press appeals meant that the commission was forced to deal with both good and bad press publicity. The extensive size and scope of the CRB press campaign notwithstanding the appeal the commission made did not always have the desired effect. In other cases the successful raising of funds was almost detrimental to its success. At times the public wondered about the altruistic motives of the commission; if they were indeed the only hope for Belgium, and whether the situation was always as grave as it appeared and if funding was in such constant, desperate need as the CRB explained. In many instances the perceptions of the commission were beyond their control. In early 1915 for example the critical situation of relief funding was misunderstood in America largely through the inaccurate wording

<sup>292</sup>Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 38. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 193. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 114-115.

<sup>293</sup>Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:266. This sum included a £100,000 grant from the British government in November 1914 and a £600,000 advance from Belgian bankers out of funds held abroad. Taillandier, *The Soul of the “CRB,”* p. 110.

of independent announcements in the press that led the public to believe that the entire responsibility for Belgian relief was shouldered by the Allied governments. As time passed the vigor of CRB press appeals declined. Public interest waned when independent committees across the country relaxed or terminated their efforts. Under the decentralized structure this was one aspect of charity that the commission was unable to control.<sup>294</sup>

In an attempt to better systematize the charitable appeals and to coordinate it with shipping and purchasing arrangements the CRB established a branch office in New York City to supervise the commission's work in America. An important function of the CRB New York office was to prepare and distribute press information relating to the day-to-day conditions in Belgium and the progress of relief. To improve efficiency Hoover hired Chairman A.J. Hemphill of the Guarantee Trust Bank as treasurer of the New York office to supervise its financial transactions in March 1915. Two months later the commission was put in a peculiar position after the sinking of the *Lusitania* on May 7. Although the American public was engrossed by the event the circumstances did not allow the neutral commission to take advantage of any potential momentum. With its future hanging in the balance the CRB was forced for several months to adopt a passive benevolent strategy. After the *Lusitania* incident settled the commission set about to strengthen its position in the US by establishing a permanent, nationwide organization comprised of state, county, and town committees.<sup>295</sup>

On both sides of the Atlantic the commission asked a number of prominent men in public life to organize special committees to raise funds to support the charitable department. In April 1915 the British National Committee for Belgian Relief was founded with the Lord Mayor of

<sup>294</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:265.

<sup>295</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 61. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:245. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 211. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:265-266. Loc cit, p. 2:266.

London as its chairman and an executive committee comprised of the most distinguished names in the country. The result was the replacement of dormant or overlapping committees with a permanent, decentralized structure through which the entire general public could be reached. In November, the CRB launched its new, energetic campaign across the country that generated \$500,000 in clothing and \$1,250,000 in cash before March 1, 1916.<sup>296</sup>

### **The Public Relations of the CRB (1914-1915)**

Public relations were a critical component of CRB work for no other reason than the depth of involvement it called for from the citizens of the world. *The London Times* reported that what the world was asked to provide by the commission was not only money and material commodities but also personal service on a scale that led to more than a thousand committees. Hoover and colleagues shrewdly used publicity to press for Belgian assistance. The Chairman first came in contact with American press correspondents in London after the outbreak of war during his work with the American Relief Committee. Based on his previous relationships with American journalists at home he only had to explain what he had in mind to gain their approval. In particular, the tendency of the belligerents to “toss the ball of responsibility” around for feeding the civil population in Belgium was advantageous for the commission. Hoover believed that if the rights of the civil population could be made a question of public interest second to the war itself then a strong sympathy for Belgians would be created. The CRB built an extensive press campaign around this concept that yielded tremendous results.<sup>297</sup>

Increasingly CRB calls for benevolence transcended practical necessity into the realm of moral and religious duty. Hoover himself referred to Belgian relief as moral and religious

<sup>296</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 212, 65. Loc cit, p. 65. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:266. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 212.

<sup>297</sup> *The London Times*, *History of the War*, p. 455. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 39. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 319. Loc cit, p. 319-320.

phenomenon, adding that an alarm had been sounded that aroused national consciences. Pope Benedict XV considered the work of the commission “so humanitarian and holy” (especially for the children of Belgium) that he “endorsed it most heartily.” CRB press appeals also referred increasingly to the work as historic. On January 10, 1915 the *New York Times* printed a commission statement saying that “In all history there has never been such an exhibition of nationwide generosity as the people of the United States are giving in their efforts to save Belgium from starvation.” The portrayal of relief work as monumental gave weight to the CRB’s drive for private benevolence. The press campaigns had to be reinvigorated periodically as the commission pressed for more money over longer periods of time while the message remained fairly consistent.<sup>298</sup>

Raising money—private money—was a crucial part of the relief work with publicity playing a critical role as the direct messenger of the commission’s program to the individual donors and the CRB’s committees around the world. Hoover explained to Lindon Bates at the CRB New York office in April 1915 that despite its slump in fund raising after the initial jolt the commission simply could not abandon the benevolent side of relief because governmental support only operated as a matter of exchange that did not include providing support for the destitute. Publicity was important because the attention of American, Allied, and neutral nations had to be called upon in an emphatic way to the situation in Belgium and the possibilities of saving them from what T.B. Kittredge called “the greatest imaginable calamity that such (a) nation whose courageous fight against its invader had aroused universal admiration, and whose sad fate had been the occasion of equally universal sympathy.”<sup>299</sup>

<sup>298</sup> Taillandier, *The Soul of the “CRB,”* p. 231. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:279. *New York Times*, Jan 10, 1915, p. 1.

<sup>299</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:267. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 38.



The CRB established a vigorous press campaign in Britain similar to the one in place in the United States. Unlike in America, a sense of guilt pervaded British attitudes towards the invasion of Belgium after the war began. For the enthusiastic majority there was also a strong sense of shame at the inability of British forces to halt the German invasion. As foreigners and as people in distress the Belgians were of great interest to many Englishmen during the war. In the British press *The Daily Chronicle* reported that the longer the war lasted the greater duty the British public and its government had in assisting Belgium. The paper explained that France was doing all it could and the Americans were chipping in as a neutral power, but the fact remained that Belgium was unable to support itself. The *Huddensfield Daily Examiner* added on the subject that “The destitute in Belgium are wards of the world.”<sup>300</sup>

The British press resoundingly focused on the recurring theme that their countrymen were in a position like no other nation to assist the Belgians. Combined with Allied partisanship the sentiments heightened the sense of duty impressed upon Englishmen. *The Times* reported in early 1915 that without outside aid the Germans would allow the Belgians to starve. Press statements also conjured up images of suffering that played well to public sympathies. The *Scotsman Edinburgh* published an article saying that “When you think of Belgium, think not only of the black lines before the soup kitchens, of the black groups of men without work in the squares of the day, of the villagers pitch black at night; think too of the tens of thousands of the once well-to-do who now have lost or are losing all that they have hitherto enjoyed.”<sup>301</sup>

Members of Parliament frequently spoke on the subject of Belgian relief before their constituents as the British government became more heavily involved in the funding of ravitaillement. M.P. G.K. Chesterton of Beaconsfield wrote in a letter that was published in the

<sup>300</sup> Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 6. Loc cit, p. 17. *The Daily Chronicle*, Jan 28, 1915. *Huddensfield Daily Examiner*, Feb 16, 1915.

<sup>301</sup> *The Times*, Feb 13, 1915. *Scotsman Edinburgh*, March 8, 1915 and *South Wales Daily Post*, March 8, 1915.

*Buxton Advertiser* that Belgians not only paid the ultimate sacrifice for their own nation but did so for all of Europe. “The things of shameless shame that have been done are something worse than prodigies, worse than nightmares, worse than devilries, they are facts,” M.P. Chesterton added. M.P. and Belgian National Committee member Percy Alden explained that “I do not really think that the British people quite fully comprehend the need of Belgium today.”<sup>302</sup>

By October 1915 the sense of urgency regarding food supplies in Belgium was a major issue covered in the British press. On October 2 the *South London Press* reported that hundreds of thousands of Belgians would starve without further assistance. It added that despite the situation the system of distribution in Belgium was doing its part in keeping foodstuffs away from German soldiers. Minister Whitlock in a message from Brussels promised the British public that to date there was not a single instance in which a pound of food sent under the commission’s guarantees with the Allies and Germany had been touched by German authorities. Although the commission kept its promises the article still held the Germans responsible for the situation in Belgium. The paper declared in condemnation that the Germans “will not, or cannot, save the 7,000,000 people from starving to death.”<sup>303</sup>

To supplement its press campaigns the Commission issued several series of advertisements that included brochures, pamphlets, and endorsements from famous literary figures among others. The commission’s “A Million a Month to Save the Belgium’s Hungry Children” advertisement aimed at Americans explained that while the “efficiency and devotion” of Hoover and his associates had an enormous impact on prestige abroad the nation was not giving it share. “Less than one-twentieth of the total contributions for Belgian Relief have come

<sup>302</sup> *Buxton Advertiser*, Aug 7, 1915, and the *Universe*, Aug 13, 1915. In the same article the Derbyshire County Committee for Belgian relief announced that its object was to make sure that they were never accused of allowing Belgium to starve. *Buxton Advertiser*, Aug 7, 1915. *South London Press*, October 2, 1915.

<sup>303</sup> *South London Press*, October 2, 1915.

from this country,” explained the appeal. With British and French government subsidies reaching their limits the population of Belgium looked to America as its savior. “America and America alone can avert the ultimate, unthinkable tragedy which the failure of the Commission’s finances would mean to Belgium,” the advertisement concluded. In a similar pamphlet entitled “Have You Done Your Bit for Belgium,” the commission stated that Britain, Australia, and New Zealand contributed 22 cents, \$1.34, and \$2.29 respectively towards Belgian relief. Americans by contrast donated 10 cents per person.<sup>304</sup>

The Women’s Section of the CRB also issued advertisements and appeals aimed at their constituents in America. Women, these advertisements claimed, were the individuals in particular who needed to come to the rescue of Belgium. Duty and honor were a common call in commission advertisements—the Women’s Section being no exception. They asked “American women to recall and deserve anew the immortal tribute they won from our great Lincoln, and to highly resolve that this people, under God, shall not perish from the earth.”<sup>305</sup>

A large number of CRB advertisements focused on babies and children in particular as the innocent victims that suffered most tragically. “The most helpless victims of the war are children,” the CRB Pamphlet “Les Petites Abeilles” (The Little Bees) explained, “and their preservation in health is one of the most vital as well as the most appealing problems of the times, since on their conservation (depends) the future of the Belgian nation.” As one of the most prominent relief organizations for the children of Belgium the “Little Bees of Brussels”

<sup>304</sup> “A Million a Month to Save Belgium’s Hungry Children!” CRB Advertisement. Herbert Hoover Presidential Library Archives: Hoover Pre-Commerce Collection 1895-1921, CRB Pamphlets, 1914-1919: Box 32, Folder 2. While the United States provided many of the men who organized and administered Belgian relief, America contributed five percent of the total disbursements made to Belgium. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 3. CRB Pamphlet “Have You Done Your Bit for Belgium” Herbert Hoover Presidential Library Archives: Hoover Pre-Commerce Collection 1895-1921, CRB Pamphlets, 1914-1919: Box 32, Folder 2. These figures exclude governmental subsidies from their totals.

<sup>305</sup> Women’s Section of the CRB “Appeal.” Herbert Hoover Presidential Library Archives: Hoover Pre-Commerce Collection 1895-1921, CRB Pamphlets, 1914-1919: Box 32, Folder 2.

managed 60 canteens that provided a nourishing meal for more than 25,000 children and nursing mothers every morning. In a similar advertisement the pamphlet “Babies’ Milk Funds,” declared that milk was the most indispensable yet expensive weapon in the fight to save children. Despite all its efforts to coordinate milk production in the provinces it was still unable to provide milk at a reasonable price for the destitute. Only private initiative could assist the commission in supplying milk at an affordable rate to Belgium.<sup>306</sup>

Written appeals by famous authors of the era also gave credence to both the work being performed by the commission and the drive for increased levels of support that it needed through private charity. Arnold Bennett in the third edition of “The Need of Belgium” bluntly told readers that those which charity cannot reach will die. He added that the commission would not succeed unless it existed in a permanent state of “active well-doing.” Speaking to personal responsibility, Bennett added that relief efforts would be futile if individuals would not realize in their own hearts the immensity of need in Belgium that in his opinion surpassed “all the needs of history.”<sup>307</sup>

Author Anthony Hope in his contribution to the volume also spoke to the necessity for Americans to do more. Hope added that enough could not be said “to fire the imagination and touch the heart” so that people would understand the “imperative need and extreme magnitude” of the work that the CRB was doing. Explaining the situation further, he believed that a “spasm of emotion” was not enough; the efforts of a few societies or impassioned individuals could not save an entire nation. What was called for was a truly national effort.<sup>308</sup>

<sup>306</sup> CRB Pamphlet “Les Petites Abeilles.” CRB Pamphlet “Babies’ Milk Funds.” Herbert Hoover Presidential Library Archives: Hoover Pre-Commerce Collection 1895-1921, CRB Pamphlets, 1914-1919: Box 32, Folder 2.

<sup>307</sup> Bennett, Arnold et al. “The Prodigious Problem of Belgium, with a Few Words to the Kind Heart in *The Need of Belgium* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). The Commission for Relief in Belgium, New York City, New York (no year listed), 9. Loc cit, p. 10. According to Bennett, “It (the CRB) cannot succeed unless an unending procession of great ships of food continues to cross the seas for months and months to come.”

<sup>308</sup> Bennett, *The Prodigious Problem of Belgium, with a Few Words to the Kind Heart*, p. 21.

In the final two articles authors of the piece A.E.W. Mason and George Bernard Shaw summarized the realities of Belgian relief both physically and ideologically. Mason explained in his contribution that Belgians were without food, earnings, shelter, and other basic needs. The result was that people either living in squalor or as refugees. George Bernard Shaw by contrast discussed the moral aspects of Belgian relief, telling readers that Belgium was the only nation in the war that had conflict forced upon it. According to Shaw it didn't matter what side an individual supported; what mattered was that Belgium was "utterly powerless" to prevent what had happened. People for that reason were compelled to assist the beleaguered country caught between the great European powers.<sup>309</sup>

Beyond orchestrating the extensive press campaigns of the CRB, Chairman Hoover also participated in benefit dinners as the keynote speaker. From New York to Colorado he gave impassioned, articulate, first-hand accounts of the situation in Belgium. Hoover was not a man to mince words at these events. His depictions explained the seriousness of the situation and the ongoing need for American benevolence. The job of organizing Belgian relief and serving as its most recognized spokesman was difficult and time consuming. George Barr Baker in 1915 noticed how worried Hoover appeared to be under his "imperturbable exterior" after a charity dinner in New York City. After his speech, the chairman came and sat next to Baker and said, "My name is Hoover. I (have) one of the worst jobs in the world."<sup>310</sup>

Urgency and the seriousness of problems in Belgium were common themes in the chairman's personal appeals to Americans at dinners and speaking engagements. Hoover at another charity dinner that raised \$500,000 in New York personalized the experience of Belgians by painting a picture of what life would be like in America if they faced similar circumstances.

<sup>309</sup> Bennett, *The Prodigious Problem of Belgium, with a Few Words to the Kind Heart*, p. 24. Loc cit, p. 28.

<sup>310</sup> Taillandier, *The Soul of the "CRB,"* p. 113. In Denver, Colorado Hoover gathered the local committee and gave a fifteen minute un-planned speech that raised funds for the organization. Baker, *The Great Fat Fight*, p. 2.

He explained that for 10,000,000 people there was no salvation or solution—their only ease was the commission. As the provider to the commission the Belgians looked at Americans as their only hope. “The Belgians have come to look upon the Americans as their sole saviors; to look upon the American flag as the flag which is fighting to protect them,” Hoover added. In regards to urgency, the chairman told listeners that the CRB was between \$3,000,000 to \$5,000,000 short a month. Only public charity could provide this money he explained.<sup>311</sup>

At an address to the National Geographic Society the chairman reiterated the precarious position the commission was in. Throughout the war CRB storehouses held from one to two months food supplies for Belgium at the most with a goal of never letting stocks fall below this minimum. While Hoover emotionally appealed to audience he made it clear that his words were not exaggerated. “We make no attempt to present to you pathetic, heartbreaking pictures of emaciated or dying children,” the chairman explained, “all we represent to you (are) the happy faces of children well cared for, well nourished, the objects of our particular solicitude.” “Ours has been an ambition to maintain the laughter of children, not dry their tears,” Hoover concluded.<sup>312</sup>

The speech also included an honest assessment by Hoover on the role Americans were playing in the ravitaillement of Belgium and Northern France. Personally, the chairman hoped to write a bright chapter of American history in this war through efficiency, humanity, devotion, and self-sacrificed through the commission’s work but instead feared that “this chapter will never be completed, and that we may have failed in the great task which we set for America in the saving of ten (million helpless people).” Much like at the New York dinner, Hoover explained to the crowd that the commission was short between \$3,000, 000 and \$5,000,000 a

<sup>311</sup> *New York Times*, Jan 30, 1917, p. 1. *New York Times*, Jan 30, 1917, p. 3.

<sup>312</sup> *New York Times*, Feb 18, 1917, p. 3.

month and added that five months ago an American-based initiative to raise \$1,250,000 a month failed. The chairman himself was embarrassed by the “apathy of the (this) country (that) caused failure.” Hoover lamented, “I have stood ashamed before a thousand children who, on my entrance from their daily meal, warbled the opening stanzas of ‘The Star Spangled Banner.’”<sup>313</sup>

Press appeals, media campaigns, and speaking engagements combined with local committee efforts to produce results in America. In New York City the local committee collected more than \$250,000 over a two month period. The *New York Times* assisted their work by publishing the names of donors and the amount that they contributed to the cause. During the first months of the war the Rockefeller Foundation became one the largest private donors by providing nearly \$700,000 up to its retirement at the end of January 1915. In total the various institutions and groups cooperating with or directly organized by the CRB collected over \$52,000,000 during the war worldwide. According to commission records the United States donated \$34,521,027 of this total.<sup>314</sup>

Over the first two years of the war these sums proved invaluable before larger government subsidies were granted, and more importantly private benevolence generated by the

<sup>313</sup> *New York Times*, Feb 18, 1917, p. 3.

<sup>314</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 61. *New York Times*, Jan 31, 1915. The *New York Times* reported that “The withdrawal of the Rockefeller Foundation was received regretfully by many prominent persons connected with Belgian relief activities yesterday. The foundation went to work, intending to devote millions of dollars, if needed, to helping the destitute and at one time planned to lease piers and organize a transport fleet. The formation of the Commission for Relief in Belgium, however, changed this plan and from now on the commission will be the only agency in this country for handling the transportation work.” Despite the Rockefeller Foundation’s contribution (and the positive press the foundation received in the *New York Times*), Hoover and Whitlock were both disappointed by the organization. Hoover told Whitlock in June 1915 that the Rockefeller Foundation had disappeared from Belgium and that while they had given approximately \$700,000 their public announcements and promises cost the commission at least \$2,000,000. Whitlock recorded in his journal that the Rockefeller Foundation moved on to Poland where they “did worse than nothing there,” providing no money or organization. Afterward, the Germans approached Hoover to take up relief work in Poland as well. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:170. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:235. World Charity during World War I totaled \$52,290,835. Of this figure, \$20,490,322 was collected in cash and \$31,800,513 represented gifts in kind. Loc cit, p. 2:473. According to the Public Relations of the CRB Documents released in 1929 the \$34,531,027 donated by the United States represented 66.0 percent of total world charity. Ibid, 2:473. The United States contributed \$34,521,026.99 in “benevolence” during World War I. Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. 142.

CRB demonstrated the strength of moral support behind the undertaking which played an important role in securing governmental assistance. Appeals through newspapers, periodicals, and mailings generated this public support which was rooted in the people's knowledge of conditions inside Belgium and of the commission's objectives for ravitaillement. As time passed an informed public was of tremendous value for Hoover in his negotiations with belligerent governments for subventions and guarantees. In Britain the press campaigns of the commission were generating both awareness and substantial sums of charity. During the course of its two years of work the British National Committee collected £2,411,222 (an average of over £100,000 a month in cash). Combined the British Empire donated \$16,641,035 worth of world charity during the war years. Of this sum nearly three-fourths came from British dominions overseas, with Australia, New Zealand, Canada, India, and South Africa each making major contributions.<sup>315</sup>

During the winter months of 1914 and 1915, Hoover worked towards the dual goal of securing funding through private charitable donations and government subventions. By January 1, 1915 it became evident however that the current program of the commission requiring almost £1,500,000 a month could not be carried on unless larger sources of capital—governmental funds especially—could be accumulated. In a letter to Walter Hines Page, Hoover recalled that although the CRB's initial appeals were met by a generous response it soon became evident that the “task was far too great for private philanthropy alone; it was necessary to secure financial aid on so large a scale that nothing less than the most generous governmental assistance could provide for our work.” Not only were the sums advanced by Allied governments inadequate to

<sup>315</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:235. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 65. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:473. According to the Public Relations of the CRB Documents released in 1929 this represented 31.8 percent of the world charity total. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 65. Australia contributed approximately £990,000, New Zealand £505,000, Canada £170,000, India £39,000, and South Africa £35,000. Loc cit, p. 65.



cover the full requirements of the commission but they were also insufficient to cover the capital costs of purchasing foodstuffs through existing monetary exchanges.<sup>316</sup>

Beginning in March 1915, the CRB received monthly governmental subventions of approximately \$5,000,000 for Belgium and \$2,500,000 for Northern France with no guarantees that these advances would extend beyond June of that year. For a few months at least the commission was assured the ability to meet its financial requirements. By this point however the flood of charitable contributions generated in the first few months of the war were not slowing down to a trickle. By the summer of 1915 the commission was finding it impossible to meet the ever-increasing needs of ravitaillement.<sup>317</sup>

From mid-1915 forward, Hoover and the CRB pressed harder for governmental assistance. Their efforts proved fruitful. At the end of the war government subsidies totaled \$700,540,443.38. Of this total, \$386,632,260.44 was donated by the U.S. government, \$109,045,328.73 was provided by the British, and \$204,862,854.21 was supplied by the French. Combined, benevolence (charity), commercial exchange donations, and governmental subventions provided the commission with \$759,159,607.19 of basic capital.<sup>318</sup>

<sup>316</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 111. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:91. Loc cit, p. 2:265.

<sup>317</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:267. June marked the beginning of the new harvest. After that point it would be necessary to renegotiate guarantees and agreements regarding new projected domestic crop totals within Belgium.

<sup>318</sup> Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. 142. According to the commission the money advanced by the French government was ostensibly a loan to the communes of the invaded areas being delivered through the Commission, the Comité National, and the Comité Français in the form of food. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 155-156. Since 1914 the US government had given diplomatic support to the CRB abroad and official backing in America as the only agency authorized to carry on charitable aid to Belgium through the Allied blockade. It was not until the United States officially entered the war the commission received funding from the US Treasury. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:282. Commercial exchange donations totaled \$6,328,328.30. Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. 142.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: *Coordinating the “Perfect Transport System”*

### The CRB Procurement Structure

Procurement of supplies precluded the long journey of CRB benevolence to the mouths of people in Belgium and Northern France. In coordinating the flow of benevolence the commission was called upon to conduct business in all parts of the world. As an organization, the businessmen who made up the CRB were specially trained to deal with the issues and complexities of worldwide commerce. In handling the commission’s business its representatives were in touch with firms that made large foreign purchases a matter of daily routine. Through their assistance the process of shipping and receiving was made significantly easier. Some wrangling occurred over selling prices and freight charges, but the majority of the work was discharged almost mechanically by a staff of experienced clerks.<sup>319</sup>

In America the CRB New York office not only handled the commission’s press campaigns but also served as the center for purchasing and shipping. Out of this location the arrangements for wheat and pork products were coordinated. Through the end of the second year of operation, the New York office dispatched a total of 1,587,890 tons of cargo—1,227,420 of which was wheat. Over that same period the office also collected approximately \$8,750,000 in food, clothing, and money.<sup>320</sup>

Through the efforts of volunteers with practical business backgrounds the CRB New York office reached a high degree of efficiency in purchasing and shipping in its early days of operation. With the assistance of Brand Whitlock the New York office secured free transportation for all goods donated to the commission from numerous railroad companies across

<sup>319</sup> The London Times, *History of the War*, p. 447. According to the *History of the War* the business experience that CRB delegates possessed meant that no transaction was likely to confound them by sheer magnitude. Loc cit, p. 448.

<sup>320</sup> Honnold, W.L. “The Commission for Relief in Belgium,” reprinted from *Engineering and Mining Journal*, Jan 20, 1917, p. 8. Agricultural note: 1,227,420 tons of wheat is approximately 45,823,680 bushels.

the country. Through these arrangements special reductions were granted by express companies while agreements were made with postal authorities for expeditions handling of parcels consigned to the commission and for payment of charges by the CRB at the final destination point. In order to efficiently coordinate purchasing and receiving, Hoover believed that it was essential to initiate a mechanism of single control to assure a non-competitive, continuous flow of foodstuffs. Representatives of Armour & Company, the Chicago Board of Trade, and Mr. E.G. Broenniman helped the commission achieve this goal by carefully watching the markets and making purchases on behalf of the CRB. In doing so the commission was able to secure foodstuffs at a price considerably less than market averages.<sup>321</sup>

At virtually every step of the purchasing and receiving chain there were volunteers and cooperating businesses that rendered invaluable assistance. Whether it was through railway concessions, reduced freight costs, or careful purchasing, the generosity of volunteers saved the commission from middlemen. The extra savings made more than just a marginal difference in ravitaillement efforts. In Belgium for example it allowed the commission to turn a profit of £156,000 per month in early 1915 off of the sale of bread offered at the ruling market price in London. What this meant was that by paying no more than the average Londoner for bread the well-to-do in Belgium were giving £150,000 a month to fellow destitute countrymen. Whitlock commented that the stupendous organization that gathered wheat from the pampas in Argentina to the prairies of the Dakotas and shipped it overseas to Belgium was so scientifically created that it absorbed numerous shocks and fluctuations without failing.<sup>322</sup>

Problems of numerous varieties notwithstanding, the efforts of the CRB system and its participants to efficiently coordinate relief supplies steadily improved. By 1916 the commission

<sup>321</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 210. Loc cit, p. 64. Loc cit, p. 57.

<sup>322</sup> *The Times*, Feb 13, 1915. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:362. Whitlock credited the scientific organization of the system to the “genius” of Herbert Hoover.

upped its shipping totals from improved from 983,808 tons to 1,278,946. Despite the tremendous efforts made by the committee, Hoover reported that many sacrifices had already made and much work to still be done: “Cold statistics do not express the suffering of people or their anxieties for their future. Nor do they acclaim those who died on sea or land for the millions who were saved.”<sup>323</sup>

In the next phase of provisioning the procurement of ships to transport foodstuffs into Belgium and Northern France was no less important than the accumulation of funds and the purchase of supplies. Logistically, the initial problem the CRB was force to deal with was the securing of the necessary amounts of ships and tonnage to bring ravitaillement in to Belgium. Economically, the demands of governments and private commerce after the war began drove charter rates to unprecedented heights. Obligated to compete, the commission found itself forced to spend an increasing amount of its inadequate funds on transportation costs instead of actual food supplies. Realizing that this condition would get worse rather than better, Hoover in December 1914 instituted a program with the objective of securing a permanent relief fleet that would make the commission virtually independent of the market.<sup>324</sup>

Hoover’s attempt to secure a neutral fleet was hampered by restrictions placed upon shipping by the Allied governments. While shipping deals struck between the CRB and neutral vessels had gained the support of the British government in early 1915, the French government refused to grant its approval to the program. Months later when the French government became desperate for shipping they gave support to the commission’s efforts only to witness the German government block any additional tonnage of relief supplies the country would have received. In

<sup>323</sup> Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 1:164 and 267-268.

<sup>324</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:304. Loc cit, p. 1:322. The CRB was forced to compete with the Allied and neutral governments who were pressed for ships to transport supplies for civilian and military needs. Loc cit, p. 2:476.

total the French government's failure to approve the CRB's plan for neutral shipping probably cost the Allies hundreds of millions in freight charges.<sup>325</sup>

The chairman felt the full force of pressure to secure neutral tonnage. On February 26, 1915 he reported that it was "utterly impossible" for the commission to deliver one pound of food to Rotterdam unless ships are allowed to sail directly from Britain and unless the German government is prepared to instruct its navy that ships bearing CRB markings traveling on this route were to be respected. Without the opening of the blockade and freedom on the seas the "whole business becomes absolutely hopeless." Prohibitions of shipping also made it increasingly difficult to transport foodstuffs from the United States to Britain. The only alternative was to seek food supplies from other parts of the world at a much higher price.<sup>326</sup>

Once the commission began securing neutral vessels a number of Belgian-owned crafts became an important part of the shipping program. In general these ships were bargained for by the CRB for each individual trip in the same manner that British and other neutral charters were secured. The acquisition of these vessels was also hampered by complications including the reticence of the Shipping Control Committee to allow Belgian ships flying the British flag to be under the exclusive dominion of the CRB. Despite Hoover's on-going appeals to the Allies, the commission was forced to continue purchasing tonnage on the open markets. Nevertheless, the CRB finalized its basic program of railroad and ocean system in January 1915. Working in conjunction with 65,000 post offices, six express companies, and the principal American railroad

<sup>325</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:323.

<sup>326</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:317.

lines the commission amassed a fleet of thirty-one steam ships under its command. Each ship was provided with a large flag bearing the words “Commission Belgian Relief, Rotterdam.”<sup>327</sup>

Hoover also believed that there was only one way to handle the shipping problems of the commission within Belgium as well. Over its first four months of existence the CRB was only able to secure the transport of 2,000 tons a month over the Belgian railway system that would need to bring 10-15,000 tons monthly. The chairman rationalized that even if railway supply was practicable there was the serious risk of shipping foodstuffs through German lines. The solution was to initiate a program using the extensive canal system of Belgium through a fleet of shallow draft barges. While representatives understood that there would be some difficulties in securing personnel, in April 1915 the commission made arrangements for ten boats as soon as they could be made ready and placed orders for more vessels as fast as captains and crews could be hired. John Beaver White told Hoover that once in place the program could expect the arrival of large tonnages in Belgium within a month (May 1915). Slowly but surely the CRB began leasing 300 Dutch barges at Rotterdam to complete the final phase of shipping. The hundreds of idle Dutch lighters combined with the hundreds of Belgian canal boats sent to Holland during the initial invasion to become the commission’s first permanent fleet of vessels.<sup>328</sup>

### **Initial CRB Shipping Agreements**

A key component of the CRB’s shipping program was the development of the “dispatch” clause in ship’s charters. Originating in the Rotterdam office, the clause was created to increase overall efficiency in the commission’s shipping system. Traditionally, charters had always

<sup>327</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:333. *New York Times*, Jan 13, 1915, p. 11. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 57. Each ship also bore cloth signs on its sides with similar markings.

<sup>328</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:403. Loc cit, p.1:325. John Beaver White commented that even though the commission would have to offer higher wages to crew members of Dutch barges, recent sinking rates would make it “very difficult to secure crews at all.” Taillandier, *The Soul of the “CRB,”* p. 120. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 69.

provided for demurrage—permitting a certain number of days for loading and unloading while charging a specified sum for each day in excess of the numbers allowed. In lieu of the record times in unloading achieved on the docks of Rotterdam the commission conceived of the idea that the ship should pay for every day that could be saved from the minimum allowed. While vessel owners resisted at first, the plan was eventually put into operation as a component of practically all CRB shipping charter agreements. Through this arrangement the commission saved more than \$1,250,000 while setting a new pace for the turn-around of cargo vessels between Atlantic ports and Rotterdam.<sup>329</sup>

Before the shipping system and its proposed measures of efficiency could be implemented the CRB had to negotiate with the British government for a partial relaxation of the blockade. During the last week of October 1914, Hoover and Edgar Rickard sought a personal audience with Chancellor of the Exchequer and Future Prime Minister David Lloyd George to arrange for the forwarding of supplies into Belgium. In their meeting Lloyd George spoke of the difficulties the commission stood to face in securing the shipping of cargoes across the North Sea to Holland, adding that it would probably be impossible for the CRB to purchase the food it wanted in Britain let alone find railway transport to the coast and across the sea. Hoover countered that the subjects Lloyd George spoke about were no longer a matter of discussion—the food was already purchased, shipped to the docks, and loaded on small steamers chartered for Holland. All these ships were waiting for was the authorization to set sail. After a moment of contemplation, Lloyd George promised that the necessary licenses would be issued at once. Impressed by the chairman’s bravado, the Chancellor told Hoover, “You know, young man that

<sup>329</sup> Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. 126.

other men have gone to the tower for less than you have done. But such commendable energy in such a cause deserves to win. I congratulate you.”<sup>330</sup>

The concessions granted to the commission in late October 1914 were little more than a moral victory for relief. Even when the British government extended authorizations to neutral ships it was difficult to obtain charters to carry the cargo. These problems notwithstanding there remained the impact that a partial relaxation of the Allied blockade would have on CRB efforts in America and Europe. Hoover saw tremendous value in the issuance of safe conduct passes by the British Admiralty as an encouragement to the people who contribute gift ships, but at the same time recognized the risks that neutral shipping would be perceived as a weakening of the blockades effectiveness while providing German with potent propaganda to undermine civil resistance in Belgium.<sup>331</sup>

The British government also recognized the tepidness of the situation. They had to decide which alternative would place the least strain on their resources, cause the least friction with allies and neutrals, and give the least comfort to its enemies. In the end the British agreed after considerable discussion that English ships could be used if the German government would guarantee protection to these vessels on their way to and from Rotterdam. This promise was made with serious reservations however. In a statement released on March 18, 1915 the British government explained that “The right to stop foodstuffs destined for the civil population must therefore in any case be admitted if an effective ‘cordon’ controlling intercourse with the enemy is drawn, announced, and maintained.”<sup>332</sup>

<sup>330</sup> Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 2:53.

<sup>331</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 56. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:306 and Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 125.

<sup>332</sup> Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 125. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 56. *New York Times*, Mar 18, 1915, p. 1.



By November 1914 the commission was also negotiating with the Germans regarding its importation plans for Belgium. On November 23, the Imperial Government announced that until further notice (and without reservation of any recall which may become necessary at any time) it consented to the transportation of CRB foodstuffs to Dutch harbors and agreed to offer safe guarantees to non-neutral vessels carrying relief supplies. A month later the Germans clarified their position through the “Note Verbale” explaining their demands for non-neutral ships carrying the commission’s cargo. In it Germany declared that a vessels’ captain must abstain from any and all actions on the return that would assist the enemy. The decree further designated that a certificate of passage was good only for a single voyage and that possession of authorization papers did not bar a search of the vessel. The statement concluded with the warning that an offense against these provisions will result in the forfeiture of all rights to preferential treatment.<sup>333</sup>

Shipping missions were anything but safe despite the promises made by both belligerents and the clear marking with huge illuminated signs reading “Belgian Relief Commission” which ships carried that were visible for miles. Hoover himself admitted that, “these protections were not infallible.” On the high seas the Germans almost immediately issued caveats regarding the safety of relief shipments. On February 15, 1915 the German Embassy informed the CRB New York office that although the “German commanders will do their best to avoid any mistake, any ship entering the war zone will be in danger.” It added that any letters of safe conduct given to relief ships will not remove this danger because as the Germans explained it was practically impossible for submarines to examine papers inside the war zone. In early March, Germany attempted to give some reassurances as to its shipping guarantees through a letter sent to

<sup>333</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:25. At the time, foodstuffs were not considered contraband by the Germans. This allowed the supplies be shipped via neutral vessels. *New York Times*, Feb 3, 1917, p. 11. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:313.

Ambassador Gerard in Berlin stating that the Imperial Admiralty promised that CRB ships would be able to proceed “undisturbed” by the approved English Channel route bearing the commission’s recognizable insignia. German submarines were subsequently given similar instructions. In an official statement that followed the diplomatic release, the government explained that “it would not undertake to use their submarines to attack mercantile or any flag except when necessary to enforce the right of visit and passage.” On April 18 the German government addressed the situation again with a statement fully appreciating the work of the CRB and that “every support would gladly be lent to it,” while restated the importance of carrying clearly recognizable marks of identification. In return for its renewed promises the Germans wanted the commission to prevent all misuses of its insignia. It also recommended that un-neutral vessels should carry a certificate from American authorities and a pass from the German Ambassador in Washington testifying that the ship was headed for Holland and carrying relief supplies only.<sup>334</sup>

Securing neutral shipping and safe passage remained a difficult issue to resolve. In April 1915, Hoover was disappointed that German authorities refused to grant further safe-conduct passes unless the ships proceeded directly to the U.S. for additional cargo without stopping at British ports. Two months after receiving assurance from Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg that relief voyages would be safe the *Harpalyce* became the first CRB ship to be torpedoed by a German submarine on April 10. After discharging its cargo in Rotterdam the ship was blown up in the stern without warning and sank immediately. The ship displayed CRB markings, bearing

<sup>334</sup> Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 1:26-27. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:315. Loc cit, p. 1:315-316. Loc cit, p. 1:318. German submarines were given similar instructions. *New York Times*, Mar 18, 1915, p. 1. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:321. Loc cit, p. 1:318. According to the *New York Times*, the captain of each ship was compelled not to engage in belligerent practices and the commission pledged itself to make sure that no ship carried anything except food and clothing for the Belgian population. *New York Times*, Feb 3, 1917, p. 11. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 56.

“Belgian Relief Rotterdam” in 5 feet by 100 feet lettering on either side of the vessel and was readable for five miles. The sinking of the *Harpalyce* set a dangerous precedence for relief vessels sailing in hostile waters for the remainder of the war. According to the chairman this “gross violation” of agreements threatened the ability of the commission to secure charters and insurance policies protecting cargoes. On behalf of the commission, Walter Hines Page appealed to Ambassador Gerard in Berlin explaining that the CRB must have the right to secure safe conduct passes or else the British Admiralty will refuse any permits of its own for British ships to proceed to Rotterdam. The result would be the effective end of relief work in Belgium.<sup>335</sup>

In searching for alternative methods of shipping, Hoover first proposed to create a neutral fleet from interned German ships. With a fleet of between 40 and 50 ships the commission could use all the extra tonnage it could. Early in 1915 the chairman met informally with officers of the Hamburg-American line regarding the feasibility of the idea. Hoover explained to Sir Edward Grey in London that by his figures the use of interned ships could save the commission upwards of £80,000, not to mention the cargo space it would free up for British needs. In March the British Foreign Office presented the CRB with a list of six conditions governing the use of interned German ships, highlighted by the demand that the vessels be transferred to a firm from a neutral country and manned by crews composed entirely of neutrals.<sup>336</sup>

Progress towards a final agreement halted however when both Germany and France protested the plan. In Berlin the pressures of the military party seeking a policy of unrestricted submarine warfare overpowered those supporting the humanitarian aspects of the commission’s work. The French by contrast listed several reasons why they disapproved of the measure. A

<sup>335</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:320. Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 1:131. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:320. Loc cit, p. 1:319.

<sup>336</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:230. Loc cit, p. 1:322. Loc cit, p. 1:230. Loc cit, p. 1:324.

letter sent to Hoover in early October 1915 explained that although the ships would have neutral crews there was a distinct risk that German sympathizers might be on board. The note further explained that a hostile press would take the opportunity to say that German submarines were so successful that the Allies were forced to take such measures. Hoover's counter argument that the program's monthly savings of £100,000 to £150,000 would benefit Northern France directly fell upon deaf ears. The French were far too fixated on issue of shipping losses to change their minds. During the extended period of negotiations for interned ships (January through October 1915) the commission lost six ships by mines or torpedoes in the North Sea. Under criticisms that the program was nothing more than "dealing with the enemy" the initiative was dropped.<sup>337</sup>

### **The CRB Shipping Process**

Voyages made by CRB-chartered vessels were dangerous regardless of the mode of transport or the origin of the vessel. Armed with German safe conduct guarantees the commission began purchasing enormous quantities of foodstuffs from North America in late 1914 using large ocean going vessels. The CRB also purchased vast amounts of supplies in London which were transported across the dangerous war zone in small cross-channel boats. After discharging their cargoes at Rotterdam, all CRB vessels received another safe conduct pass and were directed across the dangerous war zone once more towards Britain for refueling. Despite its precarious location the commission chose Rotterdam as its port of entry because of its excellent harbor, equipment, and direct connection with the canal system leading into Belgium. It was not until April 1915 that the German government under the vehement protests of Hoover allowed ships to cross the English Channel immune from attack.<sup>338</sup>

<sup>337</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:331. Loc cit, p. 1:328. Loc cit, p. 1:328-329. Loc cit, p. 1:327. Loc cit, p. 1:331. Loc cit, p. 1:329.

<sup>338</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:315. Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. 125. Antwerp, Dunkirk, and Lille were used as

Private shipping interests realized full well the risks involved in chartering vessels to the neutral commission for Belgian relief. Hazards created by mines and submarines were great; many owners chose to employ their ships elsewhere on equally profitable and less dangerous voyages. Potential issues were complicated further by the crossing and re-crossing of CRB chartered ships across the Germans lines. In order to best assure safety, vessels dealt with a multitude of regulations that changed frequently. Notable among these were requirements to bear the CRB flag, special markings, safe-conduct passes, and special sailing instructions.<sup>339</sup>

The nearly universal troubles that shippers faced were exacerbated by the CRB's large tonnage requirements and because ships had to cross the narrow North Sea where the underwater naval war was at its most intense. On February 4, 1915 the German government designated the waters surrounding Great Britain including the English Channel and Ireland as the War Zone." After February 18, every enemy merchant ship met in these waters was to be destroyed. Neutrals (including the CRB) were warned that it might not be possible to prevent attacks on their ships since the British were allegedly using neutral flags. Although paragraph six of the German Admiralty's instructions to U-boat commanders demanded the sparing of CRB ships the commission was advised to avoid the War Zone entirely by sailing around the north of Scotland through the eastern part of the North Sea through a sea lane twenty miles long along the Dutch coast.<sup>340</sup>

Safe passage guarantees and new shipping lanes could not prevent losses however. The commission lost a total of 38 cargoes en route to Rotterdam—of this number 20 occurred by torpedo, 14 by mines, three by submarine fire, and one by collision. Fourteen other vessels and

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ports of entry for the CRB, but to a minor extent. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:315.

<sup>339</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:304.

<sup>340</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:304. Loc cit, p. 1:314.

cargoes were partially damaged en route. In total the 52 accidents involving CRB chartered vessels lost 114,000 tons of cargo.<sup>341</sup>

The commission found ways to charter vessels nevertheless. In the first months of relief the CRB was able to charter its initial tonnage requirements through the usual commercial channels. Gradually the commission built a continuous charter fleet of approximately 23 Belgian vessels carrying 117,355 dead weight tons. By early 1915 this fleet was entirely obsolete however and the commission began searching for additional ships to meet its minimum program of 179,000 dead weight tons. At a requirement level of 110,000 tons per month (133,000 dead weight tons) the average round trip took over two months for each vessel. To meet these demands the CRB was compelled to keep a continuously operating fleet of 290,000 dead weight tons or 58 steamers holding 5,000 tons. During this process the CRB also made the decision to centralize all shipping arrangements under the guidance of the British firms of Bird, Potter, & Hughes and Trinder & Anderson with the goal of efficiency in mind. The commission wanted to improve its methods which to date was bringing £4 to £5 worth of food for every £1 spent on transportation costs.<sup>342</sup>

Transportation for cargo into Belgium once it reached Rotterdam was also in need of coordination. According to Edward Eyre Hunt's figures, if each province was to have supplies for at least fifteen days in stock or on hand it meant that 3,000 to 20,000 tons valued from one to eight million francs needed to be constantly on the move. In the early days of the war this meant

<sup>341</sup> Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. 125. Loc cit, p. 125 and Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:476. Official CRB documents list slightly different numbers including 17 vessels torpedoed (as opposed to 20), 3 torpedoed or mined, 3 fired upon by submarines, and 15 collisions and miscellaneous accidents. The total number of shipping accidents in both accounts is 52. Official CRB documents break total of 52 accidents down by a count of 38 vessels lost and 14 damaged. Both accounts place the total number amount of cargo lost at 114,000 tons.

<sup>342</sup> Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. 125. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:476. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 57. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:219.

that approximately 20 ocean going vessels were required to arrive at Rotterdam each month. In later periods the commission often had as many as 75 ships under charter headed for this destination point at the same time. In order to handle these shipments, Hoover in March 1915 pressed for the placement of at least 50 people on staff to handle logistics.<sup>343</sup>

The process of shipping goods from Rotterdam to Brussels was no less complicated than the voyage from New York or London to Rotterdam. Until September 1915 all cargoes were consigned to Brand Whitlock and admitted duty free under the cover of his diplomatic immunity. After that time, all cargoes were assigned to the commission itself with lighters arriving without paying duties. In both cases the commission followed similar receiving procedures. Upon arrival foodstuffs were received by agents of the different regions and sent to various distribution centers. At the distribution centers the foodstuffs were counted, re-allotted, and followed step-by-step until reaching the village depots where they were sold or given away.<sup>344</sup>

On November 13, 1915 the newly-created ship-owning department of the CRB assisted shipping and receiving efforts by assuming the task of providing the lighter necessary to transport goods via the canal system. Less than a year later the CRB managed a fleet of 29 tugs and 137 lighters. Through the department's efforts a fleet of over 500 barges and canal lighters was assembled, moving goods from CRB warehouses to Belgium and Northern France. Before the close of operations the commission possessed a fleet of 495 lighters and 36 tugs.<sup>345</sup>

Combined the CRB's lighters and the canal system of Belgium became a critical component of the commission's distribution infrastructure. Edward Eyre Hunt commented that

<sup>343</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 258. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 56. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:53-54.

<sup>344</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 127. Taillandier, *The Soul of the "CRB,"* p. 109.

<sup>345</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 214. Loc cit, p. 212. Loc cit, p. 215. By September and October 1915 the new shipping program for 1915-1916 left the commission with a shortage of lighters however. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 1:6. Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 126.

no other nation had “so perfect of a transport system.” While this may have been true, the war took a tremendous toll on the supply routes. When the CRB began work in late 1914 it inherited destroyed canals, blown up locks, broken dikes, missing bridges, sunken barges, and other such man-made impediments. Before shipments could reach the communes the commission engaged in massive preliminary efforts to clear up the congestion. Once removed, food flowed speedily into Belgium. Employing a fleet of several hundred canal boats and a collection of floating grain elevators the commission was able to unload a 9,000 ton ship loaded with bulk wheat and send it down the canals in 36 hours. Journalist Arthur Mason was impressed by what he saw in Rotterdam, writing that what he observed was a great work of enterprise, skill, and business acumen on a grand scale. “It is work which in its first stage is concerned with the supply of a million tons of goods in a single year, and in its last stage with the supply of (an individual’s) daily dole of bread to some destitute applicant in a far-off Belgian village,” Mason added.<sup>346</sup>

Food flowed in increasing quantity into Belgium once questions of logistics were handled. During the first two years of operation (October 1914 to October 1916) 393 full cargoes averaging 4,980 tons and another 823 cross-channel partial cargoes averaging 315 tons reached Rotterdam for a grand total of 983,708 tons received in Rotterdam during year one and 1,300,322 tons received in year two. On average, Rotterdam received approximately 15.5 full cargoes a month carrying 87,976 tons of goods. In the second year the average increased to 17.5 cargoes bearing 108,360 tons of goods, an increase of approximately 33 percent. Actual receipts confirmed the commission’s average figures. In December 1914, 17 ships arrived bring 58,000 tons of supplies. The following month (January 1915) 20 ships arrived carrying roughly 70,000 tons. By May 1915 the commission received 36 ships bearing 125,000 tons of goods. Five

<sup>346</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 220. Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. 136. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 200. *Morning Post*, April 22, 1916.



months later (October 1915) 44 ships discharged 136,000 total tons. Combined over the five years of operation the CRB imported and distributed 5,174,431 metric tons of foodstuffs and other supplies valued at \$927,681,485.08.<sup>347</sup>

Economy and efficiency were again the defining factors of the commission's work in shipping and distribution. Arthur Mason noted that the costs of the CRB's handling of 951,000 metric tons of foods at Rotterdam during the first year of operation were no more than 3 shillings, 6 dimes per ton. Of that figure transshipment charges amounted to 44 cents Dutch (10 cents equaling an English penny) while extra costs (overtime, night work, etc.) added 14 cents, freight and towage accounted for 2 shillings, storage and warehouse expenses totaled 10 cents, and office expenses added 15 cents. Looking closer at the statistics, commission member Daniel Heinemann calculated that for every £10-£12 spent on food approximately £2 of the total represented transportation costs. Given this ratio the CRB secured £5 of food for every £1 expended on shipping.<sup>348</sup>

<sup>347</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 304. Loc cit, p. 73. Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. 13. In total, 4,686,359 tons were delivered to Rotterdam, 462,502 tons to Antwerp, 15,826 tons to Dunkirk, and 9,744 to Lille (totaling 5,174,431 tons). Loc cit, p. 126.

<sup>348</sup> *Morning Post*, April 22, 1916, *Cork Examiner*, April 28, 1916. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 59.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: *Preventing the “Hopeless Debacle”*

### CRB Diplomacy with Belligerents

The cornerstone of CRB efforts to import food into Belgium and Northern France was its diplomatic relations with belligerent nations. Away from the dangerous waters of the open seas, the battlegrounds of Belgium, and the hostile negotiations with the British, French, and British, the commission constantly searched for ways to keep the organization afloat. The CRB would have faced a premature death without agreements allowing the commission access to supplies, deals stipulating the quantities of imports, and the permission to perform ravitaillement duties. Recognition as the official relief organization operation in Belgium was an important component of the commission’s hard-earned status. Within months of the start of the war the CRB flag was a well-known and respected emblem of benevolence. The commission ostensibly became a new neutral government after its formation with its own diplomatic representatives, its own colors to protect its fleet on the high seas, and its own passports for members that were accorded preferential recognition by European nations. According to CRB member T.B. Kittredge, the commission became “the expression of the spirit of humanity throughout the world which insisted that Belgium must be saved.” To Kittredge the commission remained in the midst of world war the only vestige of internationalism and of the solidarity of civilization.<sup>349</sup>

Away from the battlefields of Belgium hard-boiled militarists in Germany, France, and Britain at one time or another opposed the work of the CRB and demanded its suppression. Conducting relief efforts in a manner that would appease all three nations proved to be an ongoing difficult problem for the commission. The CRB frequently found itself caught between belligerent disputes over military blockades. German militarists stated that they would gladly

<sup>349</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:65. Loc cit, p. 1:66. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 1:7, Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 55 and 55-56. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 1:7.

feed the occupied peoples of Belgium if the British abandoned the “illegal” food blockade. Moreover, they insisted that they could not be called upon to feed Allied sympathizers by depriving their own women and children. Meanwhile, French and British militarists claimed that without the CRB the Germans would be compelled to feed their occupied populations. As a result of their actions the commission relaxed the pressure of the Allied blockade against Germany and prolonged the war.<sup>350</sup>

With its elevated status the commission appeared to be the only institution with the power to save Belgium. In *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, T.B. Kittredge stated as a matter of fact that without the intervention of the CRB any importation of food would have been “quite impossible.” “It was only the diplomatic activities of the commission, in securing concessions from both belligerent groups, that saved the people of Belgium from famine and its consequences,” Kittredge concluded. His wife, Mable Hyde Kittredge concurred. She reported that because of its status commission members were granted immediate audiences with cabinet members in Europe and were issued special passes allowing members and agents the rights of free movement in Belgium. No other institution or individual were granted these same special privileges.<sup>351</sup>

The reputation of the commission would be leaned on heavily especially in regards to funding. Throughout the war the commission relied on government subsidies as well as world charity for funding. In February 1915, Hoover wrote to President Woodrow Wilson about the financial problems of relief. In his correspondence, Hoover explained that the CRB found it difficult to meet its operating expenses of \$7,500,000 per month. Although the flow of charity was generous, it was entirely inadequate for the critical demands placed on the organization.

<sup>350</sup> Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 1:21-22.

<sup>351</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 101. Kittredge, *Taking Care of Belgium*, p. 4.

The only recourse left for the CRB was to seek financial assistance from the belligerent powers themselves. Throughout its existence the CRB was mainly supported by government subsidies. Between 1914 and 1919 Britain provided \$109,290,328 and France another \$204,862,260 in direct assistance to the commission. Combined with the \$52,290,795 generated from charity, total contributions to the CRB were nearly \$1,000,000,000.<sup>352</sup>

In dealing with belligerent governments the commission followed a general line of strategy. Its work with officials was based on loosely formatted contracts between the belligerent governments with the commission serving as a negotiator and executive agent for enforcing the contract. This form of arrangement combined with the realistic application of strategic diplomatic compromise allowed the commission to press for the most amiable results possible. By a rigid adherence to the principles of neutrality and by an impressive track record of producing results and staying committed to its duty the commission was able to win the confidence of the belligerent powers and persuade them to make agreements with each other through the intermediary of neutral diplomats. All objections from the various governments were overcome by persuasion, personal appeals based on humanitarian principles, exact statements of the situation free from poetic license, moral pressure from public opinion, and as a last resort through threats of imposing the burden of responsibility for the termination of relief directly on the nation in question. Commission diplomat Prentiss Gray found in his work that threatening to terminate relief was particularly effective in negotiations with the Germans. Hoover himself used the strategy several times during the war.<sup>353</sup>

<sup>352</sup> Kellogg, *Fighting Starvation in Belgium*, p. 96-97. O'Brien, Francis William (Ed.). *The Hoover-Wilson Wartime Correspondence*. (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1974), p. 6. Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 3:7. Of this total the US government provided \$386,632,260 after America entered the war in spring 1917.

<sup>353</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 106. Loc cit, p. 55. In regards to securing guarantees the CRB negotiated chiefly through patron Ministers Brand Whitlock and the Marquis de Villalobar. They dealt primarily with Governor-General Baron von der Lancken and civil administrator Dr. von Sandt. Loc cit, p. 189. Loc cit, p. 54. Withington, Robert. *In Occupied Belgium*. (Boston: The Cornhill Group, 1921), p. 121-123.

Threats of cessation and moral appeals to belligerents would have been of limited value without a strong central figure to serve as the guiding power behind multi-national negotiations. Shortly after the war began, Ambassador Walter Hines Page not only realized the seriousness of the situation but also identified the fact that if anything more than first aid or temporary relief was to be administered in Belgium there would have to be a concentration of efforts behind a vigorous and resourceful leader. If at the time Ambassador Page did not see the form that the commission would eventually take he did recognize clearly the man who was to guide, maintain, and direct ravitaillement throughout the war—the American engineer Herbert Hoover.<sup>354</sup>

Commission member Will Irwin commented that in negotiations the chairman's reputation grew once word spread that he was backing the statesmen of Europe into a corner. Stylistically, Irwin observed that Hoover used "American methods" applied to a situation in which an individual was trying to negotiate a contract through which both sides would profit. The critical component of Hoover's diplomacy was his directness—an approach that European diplomats were not accustomed to. Having dealt primarily with the "oblique method" of diplomacy, they were caught off-guard by the chairman. Hoover was in many cases the bridge between Germany and Britain in negotiations regarding Belgium. "Of course they (Germany) can do nothing without Hoover," Whitlock commented, "for the English will consent to nothing unless Hoover is there to guarantee it."<sup>355</sup>

Experience quickly informed Hoover of the proper way to deal most effectively with belligerent powers. Hoover learned from both previous experience and his initial forays into diplomatic relations that the only way to get what he wanted from governments was to personally go to the ultimate authority and frankly state his position. In carrying out his duties as

<sup>354</sup> Kellogg, *Herbert Hoover As His Friends See Him*, p. 8.

<sup>355</sup> *New York Times*, Jun 15, 1928, p. 10. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:215.

chairman, Hoover cared little about diplomatic nicety and was steadfastly resolved to leave no effort untried to attain his ultimate goals. Relentlessly the chairman combated the idea that the Germans would ever feed Belgium and declared that the commission undertook its work with the greatest reluctance only after they were convinced that the population of Belgium would starve without American intervention. Of equal value were the personal reputation he possessed and the confidence that belligerents placed in his sincerity and abilities. As the British government came to know Hoover better they were increasingly inclined to accept his word as to conditions in Belgium and accepted the value and importance of the CRB system.<sup>356</sup>

Minister Brand Whitlock played an equally important part in placing the ravitaillement of Belgium on stable diplomatic footing among the belligerent governments, especially in regards to the provisioning of relief within the country itself. Among other services rendered, Whitlock gave Hoover indispensable aid in smoothing over troubles with both the Germans and the British. There were military men in England (Lord Kitchener included) who felt that relief was a mistake and that Germany ought to be compelled to support the Belgian people or face their desperate uprising. On the opposite side there were military men in Germany who declared that they had the right to take all produce from Belgian fields and compel the blockading Allies to furnish the Belgians with one-hundred percent of the food they consumed—not merely the seventy percent guaranteed in initial promises. Whitlock specifically had to dispel British suspicions that Germany was diverting relief shipments across the Rhine and the German suspicions that Britain was importing munitions on relief ships.<sup>357</sup>

<sup>356</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 113. Loc cit, p. 113-114. Loc cit, p. 112-113. Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. 12. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 103.

<sup>357</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 1:lviii.

Caught in between the British and the Germans, Whitlock pressed both sides equally on behalf of the Belgian population. Speaking on the difficulties of his job, the minister lamented that the hatred Germans bore for the British made the task all the more difficult. Whitlock found the hatred towards Britain a “wild, implacable thing not to be overcome. It had a quality almost personal in intensity.” In Brussels, the minister nevertheless did what he could to protect the Belgians from oppression and to help solve the problems of relief. Beyond these duties he served as an arbitrator between commission’s volunteers, smoothing out the intermittent friction between CRB and Comité National workers.<sup>358</sup>

American sympathies towards the British position in the war did little to make negotiations with the Allies more hospitable. Securing the passage of foodstuffs from Allied and neutral nations proved to be a constant struggle for the CRB. The problem that was the most difficult of all for Hoover to solve was that of shipping. Within months of the organizations creation it became clear that the success of the venture depended on the willingness of the Allied powers to allow relief to pass the German blockade. In allied nations the commission faced considerable opposition to Belgian relief on the grounds that it was advantageous to the Germans since it relieved them of the responsibility to supply food to the regions they invaded. During the winter of 1914-1915, relief operations were seen by the Allies as a concession around the blockade they had installed around Europe. The 40,000,000 francs per month levy (war ransom) against Belgium in January 1915 only made the situation worse by pushing the British further into a position of refusing to offer support as long as Germany extorted money from them.<sup>359</sup>

<sup>358</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:380. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:138. Loc cit, p. 1:lviii.

<sup>359</sup> Lochner, Louis P. *Herbert Hoover and Germany*. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1960), p. 25. Ibid, p. 21. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:78. Loc cit, p. 2:1. Loc cit, p. 1:517.

The Allies had no desire to see Belgians starve, but at the same time were put in a difficult situation given the exigencies of war. For strategic reasons they could not allow food into Belgium unless the distribution and enforcement of German guarantees were supervised by the American representatives of the commission. After the first series of negotiations were complete the Allied governments made it an indispensable condition of its continued support that the Germans reserve all native food stocks for the civil population and promise not to requisition any supplies in Belgium. British authorization of relief efforts were viewed with cautious optimism at best, fearing that imported foodstuffs would directly or indirectly benefit the occupying armies despite the written guarantees of the Germans.<sup>360</sup>

Throughout the process of negotiations the British stood ready to remove its support. Reports of small infractions were numerous despite the fact that the Germans generally adhered to their initial guarantees announced on October 16, 1914. On April 1, 1915, Lord Eustace Percy informed Hoover that any attempt by the Germans to go back on their promises regarding requisitions or native crop seizures would lead Britain to immediately reconsider its whole attitude on Belgian relief. Before the end of 1915 the British government threatened to withdraw if the violation of guarantees did not stop. This tenuous footing put the commission in a precarious situation.<sup>361</sup>

While Britain kept a watchful eye and a hesitant attitude towards Belgian relief it was also one of the biggest supporters of ravitaillement efforts. Although the first decisive benevolent actions taken in England were made by private individuals, large pockets of concern for the plight of Belgium's civil population did exist in the British government. As the branch of

<sup>360</sup> Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 1:7. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 123. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:3.

<sup>361</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:90. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 159. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:90.



government most-closely associated with the Belgian situation the British Foreign Office became the second group in England to assume some of the responsibilities of ravitaillement. In performing their duties the members of the Foreign Office prided themselves on being more than mere professionals. Where lesser departments of government were disposed to cloaking their personal convictions, Lord George Hamilton and his colleagues expressed their own views unabashedly and were less inclined to draw a line between their public and private roles. As a member of this group, Lord Eustace Percy was from the beginning extremely sympathetic to the commission and its purposes. His effective assistance and continual advice were invaluable to the work of the CRB.<sup>362</sup>

The Germans by contrast cited the British blockade as the primary reason they could not feed Belgium. The German government argued that the naval barrier left Germany a garrison in a besieged fortress with barely enough to feed its population. As early as October 9, 1914 (weeks before the official creation of the CRB), Baron von der Lancken talked about relieving Brussels but said that The Hague Convention made no mention of their responsibilities towards the native population in general. In late November, the Imperial Government issued an official statement declaring that the starvation of Belgium would be due to the actions of the Allies in cutting off normal imports. Because of these actions and the character of the blockade the Germans could and would not feed Belgium.<sup>363</sup>

Despite German denunciations of the Allied blockade, the occupying general government made a clear attempt in its rhetoric to prove that it would live up to all requisition guarantees but would not give up all claims to native production. The stiffening of the German position did not

<sup>362</sup> Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, p. 55. Loc cit, p. 57. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 52.

<sup>363</sup> Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 47. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:50. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 82. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:1. To the Germans the relief of Belgium was also a strain on their utilization of resources within the conquered provinces.

result entirely from the breaking down of negotiations or because the British were softening in its attitude towards ravitaillement. Upon making his first visit to Berlin in February 1915, Hoover found the Germans immovable in regards to both requisitions and indemnities. The German general government also strengthened its stance on the commission's work within Belgium, informing Daniel Heineman on February 20 that Americans should limit themselves solely to controlling the distribution of supplies.<sup>364</sup>

Before the commission was official created a series of diplomatic negotiations between the belligerent powers laid the foundation for what would be the first stages of ravitaillement in Belgium. In early October 1914 a Belgian contingent sent from Brussels to London found the British government ready to assist its work. While the English consented in theory to ravitaillement it insisted on explicit assurances from the German governor-general that provisions imported by the Comité National would be the sole property of the Belgian civil population. The British government also stipulated that the importation of food should be under the protection of the American and Spanish ministers until shipments reached their final destination. In a final stipulation the English demanded that the governor-general reserve the Belgian wheat and rye for the civil population. On October 16, German authorities gave written assurances accepting all of these stipulations. With tentative agreements in place the CRB began work six days later.<sup>365</sup>

While these agreements provided a base for negotiations they did not necessarily give the commission an advantage pursuant to any previous deals. Given the propensity of belligerent

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<sup>364</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:521. If the British continued to use extortion as its reason why it would not assist with Belgian relief the commission was headed for disaster because of a lack of funds. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 131. General von Bissing added that in the future delegates should only have passes to travel within their own province and to Brussels that four members of the Brussels office should have passes for the whole territory, and that six passes should be granted to Holland each month for official use. Loc cit, p. 131.

<sup>365</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:47.

countries to alter its position regarding the work of the CRB or the actions of other warring nations the commission worked inside a milieu of continual change and sudden demands. Money was one of the first critical challenges the CRB faced. In the winter of 1914-1915 the commission required large amounts of cash in order to purchase provisions for Belgium. Fund raising in Britain in particular during this period was damaged by the Allied stance that it would never consent to the importation of food if it were to constitute a replacement of native supplies requisitioned by the German army.<sup>366</sup>

After private subventions decreased after the first waves of war fervor died down Hoover laboriously negotiated a basic income for the commission from Allied governments. The chairman remained optimistic as to the CRB's prospects for continuing its work regardless of its financial dearth. In a letter to American Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, Hoover explained that the Allied governments had "every confidence in the integrity of the commission and its ability to carry out the work." He added that through this support the CRB should be able to find ample funding for the carrying on the task of ravitaillement. Governmental support of ravitaillement appeared to be a matter of common sense in the views of the chairman. Hoover told Eustace Percy that he could not see from a British perspective that there should be any objection to the commission doing its work in Belgium.<sup>367</sup>

By January 1915, most of Hoover's attention and energy was paid to the CRB's campaign to secure governmental funding. During this time problems of hearsay and rumor injured the commission's appeals for funding and frustrated the chairman to no end. According to Hoover the "constant lying" taking place in the British press with regards to requisitions made

<sup>366</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:508-509.

<sup>367</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 115. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:65. After another series of negotiations, the Germans agreed not only to live up to their original guarantees but also promised in principle to reserve native crops for the civil population. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 115. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:226.

the government suspicious. In spite of the new demands made by the British government refusing to fund relief as long as Germany was extorting money from Belgium, Hoover continued to press for more support. Hoover in a cable to Lloyd George explained that Belgium “will starve or be slaughtered in thousands unless we give this support.” “No plea based on military exigency can divest us of responsibility in such a tragedy,” he continued. Hoover also used the naval blockade as a point of moral diplomatic pressure, claiming that the allies would be responsible for starvation in Belgium.<sup>368</sup>

The chairman’s vigorous efforts paid off. On January 21, Lloyd George consented to the establishment of the exchange plan as one means of financing relief. Less than two weeks later, Hoover was pressing his point directly with the Germans in Berlin. With subventions secured from the British, the mission of the chairman’s visit was to assure the German government that if they would agree to stop all requisitions the Allies would provide adequate funding for the commission. In an attempt to put even more pressure on Berlin, the commission announced on February 12 that “with the first requisition of so much as a bag of flour by the Germans it would stop any further shipments of food and cease all relief, telling the whole world the reason for its action.” The warning was a direct result of Hoover’s anger with the occupying army’s refusal to accommodate the work of delegates.<sup>369</sup>

<sup>368</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:397. Throughout these negotiations the chairman continually stressed the importance of maintaining the work already underway and included into his discussions the growing needs of Northern France. Loc cit, p. 1:52. Loc cit, p. 1:517. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 102-103. Loc cit, p. 101.

<sup>369</sup> *PRCRB*, 1:517. The exchange plan allowed the CRB to fund/purchase supplies from Belgian monies without converting internally-circulated notes into hard currency for use on the open market. In these negotiations with Foreign Secretary Prentiss Grey and Exchequer George, Hoover supported his main argument for funding with information from Berlin and Brussels that the protection of all native food supplies was guaranteed by the Germans. The chairman was mistaken however in regards to the promises made from Berlin as it was explained to him by Ambassador Gerard and Whitlock. While the Germans agreed to avoid requisitions, they had made no such promises in regards to native products. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 115. *The Times*, Feb 12, 1915. The previous day (February 11) Hoover met directly with von Bissing to work out the question of passes for delegates. The chairman was particularly upset with von Bissing’s threats to restrict the movement of CRB delegates. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:98. The press statement was

A month later, Hoover and Prentiss Grey reviewed the status of funding negotiations between belligerents to date. Grey recalled that when work began the commission was operated through the efforts of the American and Spanish ministers in London on behalf of the Belgium and that at the time the government agreed that all food supplied from neutral countries would be allowed to pass without interruption under the guarantees given by the Germans before ravitaillement began. At the time the British government also contributed £100,000 to relief but according to Hoover the sum was wholly inadequate for the commission's needs given its monthly expenditures of £400,000 to £500,000 per month. In response the CRB asked for a monthly subvention to supplement the generous public contributions made by the American public. Eventually the British government recognized that the work of the commission was operating on sound lines and possessed adequate guarantees from the Germans that imported foodstuffs would be free from requisition and interference. The sense of trust established between the commission and Britain by Hoover combined with the softening of the English position on the needs of relief cleared the way for larger governmental subventions in 1915.<sup>370</sup>

Basic agreements regarding funding and general moral support for the commission's ravitaillement efforts did not mean that the CRB was in the clear. Hoover felt that the diametrically opposed views of the belligerents only injured the greater efforts of the commission to secure funding from private sources and perform its duties in Belgium. While many in France and England now argued that Allies should be willing to give away some of its military advantage by supporting the commission, most still felt that they could not be compelled to do so as long as the Germans bullied Belgium. Recognizing this point, Hoover made it clear

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accompanied with an angry letter sent to von Bissing explaining that because of the nature of its work CRB representatives needed administrative liberties in order to assure equitable distribution of foodstuffs and to live up to the promises they made to the British government. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:48.

<sup>370</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:261.

that the commission was doing everything possible to protect and enforce German guarantees. In a memorandum to Lloyd George on February 17, the chairman promised that “there has never been any interference with the foodstuffs introduced by us.” “We can account to the satisfaction of any auditor for every sack of wheat from the time it leaves Rotterdam until it reaches the Belgian civil consumer...” Hoover pointed to the payment of restitution by the Germans for products billeted by troops as evidence of accuracy and honesty within Belgium.<sup>371</sup>

The chairman also recognized the difficult position of German as well. On January 30, the commission found plausibility in Berlin’s claim that they possessed insufficient domestic food supplies to extend a program of relief to Belgium. Several weeks later, Hoover told Whitlock in a letter that it was practically impossible to make it clear to the delegates in Brussels what a “delicate balance” the entire business was. Considering the “natural antagonisms” between both sides the desire of the commission to conduct its business in a manner that it had the absolute confidence of the belligerents became a “mighty difficult job.” “Our German friends do not always realize how easy it is to plunge us into difficulties with the English—and vice versa,” he added.<sup>372</sup>

The series of talks regarding the 1915 Belgian harvest again demonstrated the difficulties of operating between the two belligerent positions. T.B. Kittredge believed that in a way this deal was one of the most significant triumphs of the commission in regards to the enormity of concessions that the CRB was able to wring from hard pressed belligerents who were themselves beginning to feel the effects of the blockade and the consequent food shortage. One of the major sticking points at the time was the conflicting views of not only the belligerents, but of the commission and Belgium as well. When talks began in May the commission believed that its

<sup>371</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:239. Loc cit, p. 1:264.

<sup>372</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:239. Loc cit, p. 1:55.

work would end in the middle of August unless the Germans promised to protect the harvest from requisitions. The Belgians saw things quite differently. They contended that the British promised in October of 1914 that supplies could be sent to Brussels by the commission under the protection of neutral diplomats as long as German authorities operating within the country respected the agreement signed by Baron von der Goltz on October 16 stating that all supplies were under the exclusive control of the Comité National. Hoover calmly pointed out to Comité National member Emile Francqui that what this attitude did was give credence to Germany's claim that they had the right to seize Belgian crops.<sup>373</sup>

The chairman forged a dialogue between all interested parties nonetheless. At several stages of negotiations it appeared that affairs had come to an impasse and that no compromise could be reached between the irreconcilable attitudes of Germany and England in particular. In negotiations Hoover always found at the critical moment some way of bringing special pressure to bear. He pointed out specifically that the guarantees made by the commission made it necessary for the CRB to see that all foodstuffs were distributed equitably to the entire population without interference. Hoover also insisted that the commission should be allowed to institute a system of food rationing in Belgium. In order to do so the commission and the Comité National would have to be able to cut off the supply of any local commune not in compliance with the program. As a result of these talks, the chairman was not only able to continue to demand import permits for CRB foodstuffs, but he also successfully petitioned for the increased governmental subsidies required to support larger ration sizes and higher food prices while increasing the powers of the commission within Belgium.<sup>374</sup>

### **Diplomatic Relations with Britain (1915)**

<sup>373</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 173. Loc cit, p. 198. Loc cit, p. 199.

<sup>374</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 173. Loc cit, p. 194. Loc cit, p. 173.

Dealing with the British specifically proved problematic throughout 1915. While the year began with optimism it soon settled into a struggle with the future of the commission at stake. Hoover began the year with high hopes stemming from another series of German assurances from Zimmerman in Berlin and von Bissing in Belgium. In the chairman's views they were exactly what was needed at that stage of negotiations with the Britain. The mood was quickly sobered after the British Foreign Office announced in a January 13 meeting that they required the Germans to abandon specific policies before England would commit to any financial assistance. Speaking on behalf of the English, Edward Grey explained that if the Germans would eliminate their program of indemnities against the Belgians then they would assume most of the obligation of supporting the commission.<sup>375</sup>

David Lloyd George was at the time an even stronger critic of the commission's program. Hoover reported on January 21 that the Chancellor of the Exchequer vetoed the government's support of the CRB because it was assisting the enemy in several different ways. In the first case, he believed that relief was simply giving the Belgians more food that could be requisitioned by the Germans and more resources that could be seized via indemnities. Beyond these points, Lloyd George felt that ravitaillement directly prolonged the war by relieving Germany from the necessity of feeding the civil population. By offering relief to Belgium the CRB was in his opinion blunting the economic pressure that the Allies brought to bear against the Germans. Lloyd George alleged that Germany would provision Belgium as a last resort. For that reason he wholly opposed the commission's work, as benevolent and humane as it was.<sup>376</sup>

<sup>375</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:517. Loc cit, p. 1:231-232.

<sup>376</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:233. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 112 and Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:233.



Hoover intensely argued with Lloyd George over his fatalistic view of Belgium relief. The chairman specifically pointed out that the Germans had impressed none of the commission's supplies to date. Moreover, Hoover contended that Germany did not have sufficient foodstuffs to feed 10,000,000 in Belgium and support its native population as well. Lloyd George nevertheless continued to denounce his position as a "monstrous attitude." The chairman countered with the argument that Britain fought the war for the avowed purpose of protecting the existence of small nations, for vindicating the guaranteed neutrality of smaller powers, and for guaranteeing to the world the continuance of democracy. Hoover added that the hostilities of Belgian citizens discomfited German plans. Through passive acts they were still assisting the allied cause, and by deriving an advantage from these actions they were morally obliged to assist the civil population. Hoover told Lloyd George, "it would be a cynical ending if Belgium were discovered in the end to be but an empty husk; that compared to the cost, either from a military or financial point of view, it is not worth taking the risk that this should happen; that the extension of the war through the import from abroad to the Belgian civil population of 80,000 tons per month can amount to the lengthening of this conflict by only a few days; that the war will be won, not only by compelling the Germans to give up six percent of their foodstuffs to the Belgians, but by pressure on the other ninety-four percent."<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>377</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:234. On January 23, Hoover wrote to Lloyd George "It is the duty of the German government to feed their own population first, and as the German national integrity is at stake, they do not propose to jeopardize it in any manner." Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 101. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:234-235. In the January 23 letter to Lloyd George, Hoover added "These English people believe that the war undertaken at the cost of the greatest sacrifices that their people have ever made, in order to accomplish for the world to great objects: the first of these being to ensure the continuance of democracy, the second to preserve the value of neutrality and thus safeguard the right of small nations to independence and self government..." Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 102. Loc cit, p. 101. Loc cit, p. 102. Hoover reiterated the point in a memo to Lloyd George on February 17, 1915. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:265.

Lloyd George began changing his mind concerning Belgian relief in late January. More than anything else the Chancellor was becoming alert of the humanitarian aspects of relief operations and more than some members of the British government he appreciated the force of world opinion supporting the CRB. While there might have been questions in Britain whether America was pro-Ally or pro-German, there was little doubt that the United States was overwhelmingly pro-Belgian. Lloyd George stated in a February 17 meeting with Hoover that while Germany refused to give up its program of monthly indemnities in Belgium it was impossible for the British government to make direct subventions to the commission but it was instead willing to offer indirect assistance through loans. The chairman in response reaffirmed that unless foreign aid was introduced the “decimation of this population will begin within thirty days.” Having recently returned from Berlin, Hoover also reiterated the fact that with food already in short supply and that the Germans stated emphatically that they would not starve their own people to feed an enemy population.<sup>378</sup>

Swayed by Hoover during their negotiations, Lloyd George presented the chairman’s arguments to the British cabinet on February 18. After deliberation the government decided to recommend to the French a budgetary allowance of £1,000,000 for “Mr. Hoover’s Fund.” Under the agreement the French and British governments would underwrite the sum until the end of June 1915. From the English perspective, the government clarified in public that it was not offering direct assistance—even though Lloyd George had informed Hoover that finance would be supplied through the next harvest. While the subvention was not direct relief, it amounted to the same thing as far as the commission was concerned. Beyond money, the first formal recognition and financial support of ravitaillement by the British government would in the future

<sup>378</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:522. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 119. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:265. Loc cit, p. 1:264-265.

have a tremendous bearing on the subsequent attitude of the French government towards relief.<sup>379</sup>

After the announcement of the £1,000,000 allowance the British public remained skeptical about the government's decision to support relief. A letter critical of the commission written by Edward Grey was reprinted in the English press pointing out that before the Germans made requisition guarantees in December 1914 they carried away everything that they could, cattle included. In its response to Grey's letter the *Pall Mall Gazette* blamed the Germans for the problems within Belgium. The paper explained that "the Huns will not consent to release their prey. All that they will promise to do is to stop making requisitions of food in continuing their enormous exactions of money from a people suffering the extremities of destitution." "They will have their pound of flesh and their quart of blood, and those friends whom the victim has they will cynically make accessories of their own oppression and pillage," the article concluded. Speaking on the same subject, the *Yorkshire Daily Post* wondered if the Germans only gave requisition promises to the commission after there was nothing more for them to take. It added that while the CRB was scrupulous in its enforcement of guarantees there was clear evidence that the Germans had circumvented the agreement. In its view the ravitaillement of Belgium rendered an equivalent or greater amount of native produce available for enemy consumption. "We have no guarantee that presents to relieve Belgian destitution will not be used for the German army," the article flatly stated.<sup>380</sup>

Hoover was upset with the unfavorable opinions circulating about relief even though initial governmental subventions were secured for the upcoming months. In a letter to Whitlock

<sup>379</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:258, Loc cit, p. 1:404-405, Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 120. Loc cit, p. 120. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:521. Loc cit, p. 1:258. Loc cit, p. 1:405.

<sup>380</sup> *Daily Express*, February 24, 1915, *Western Mercury*, February 24, 1915. *Pall Mall Gazette*, February 24, 1915. *Yorkshire Daily Post*, February 26, 1915.

on March 6, he expressed growing alarm over the situation from the British point of view especially as the military party gained greater power. The chairman was particularly worried about the limited support staff the commission had in Belgium and that if the British found out that a mere twenty-five individuals were managing its affairs they would conclude publicly that the CRB was physically unable to execute its guarantees. To remedy the issue, Hoover cabled Ambassador Gerard in Berlin with a request to put before the German government for creating a special department within the CRB to handle foodstuffs properly. The chairman also wanted guarantees stating that these foodstuffs would not be interfered with in any manner and that commission members should be allowed have freedom of movement in the superintendence of distribution.<sup>381</sup>

The German response to Hoover's requests on March 21 was unsatisfactory to both the commission and the British government. On the key issue of guarantees regarding the upcoming harvest of 1915, the Germans stated that its army administration had a "free hand" because they supplied the components essential to securing the crop and compensated individuals for the use of land and French labor. Hoover replied to Gerard in Berlin on March 27 that under these stipulations it was "utterly useless" for the commission to raise funds from British financial institutions. The chairman feared that "No one is going to lend us money with which to buy food when the probability stares us in the face that the German army will take possession of the harvest or that the English will suppress our operations." By late March the commission was in "desperate financial straits" according to Hoover, citing its 32,000,000 mark debt on Belgian accounts as evidence of the fact. With public support drying up the CRB was faced with the challenge of purchasing over 40,000,000 marks of food a month with philanthropic support of

<sup>381</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:52. Loc cit, p. 1:53.

only about 8,000,000 marks. Without further financial assurances the chairman predicted that by May 1 the commission would face a “hopeless debacle.”<sup>382</sup>

Over the next few months the commission struggled for its financial life. Both Hoover and Whitlock reported that the increasing influence of the military element in the British cabinet complicated issues further. Whitlock commented that it was barbaric and selfish for Britain to assume that England could be saved only by sacrificing Belgium. Within the British government the perception persisted that the commission’s work was strafing towards failure. Eustace Percy in a letter to Hoover believed that the CRB’s work would have to stop by mid-August unless the Germans gave guarantees that they would scrupulously respect harvest yields. More disconcerting was the realization that the clock of support for Belgian relief in Britain was running out. Percy foresaw that unless harvest guarantees were secured quickly the British public would see no reason why the commission should continue its operations until that point when the Germans would be able to relieve themselves off of Belgian crops.<sup>383</sup>

As the harvest approached tensions grew. Without a definite deal regarding native products the commission’s apprehension increased day-by-day. In early July, Hoover feared the limitations and stipulations placed on the CRB by the Allied governments were blunting the greater potential of the commission to import a wider assortment of foods and increase the minimum ration of 250 grams of four per day per person currently in place. Central to the Allied position was the British stipulation clearly dividing the feeding and maintenance of the civil population of Belgium from that of the occupying army. Without strict and rigid adherence to this principle the Allies could offer no assistance to the commission. Moreover, the British still

<sup>382</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:52. Loc cit, p. 1:53. Loc cit, p. 1:411. Loc cit, p. 1:413. Loc cit, p. 1:524.

<sup>383</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:118. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:529.

maintained that the Germans showed their determination to divest themselves from responsibility in Belgium through requisitions and seizures. Frustrations among commission members mounted as the days passed. Whitlock commented on July 8 the English government was “nothing but an inert mass of stubborn inefficiency, incapable of checking Germany, or of doing anything, and so interfering with those who can accomplish something in the world.”<sup>384</sup>

In mid July a breakthrough was reached, allowing a glimmer of hope for the fall of 1915. On July 17 a statement was released to Walter Hines Page via the British Foreign Office with the British government’s demands for the commission. Beyond the reaffirmation of previous promises to protect foodstuffs from German requisition, the letter proposed that the entire yield of the present harvest of breadstuffs in Belgium should be acquired, controlled, and distributed by the CRB and the Comité National alone under terms similar to those already in place. In the meantime, Hoover continued to press the British government and criticize their unswerving commitment to the blockade. In a meeting at the British Foreign Office the chairman called it an illegal and inhuman thing that was stupid politically and economically. Hoover advised that if the blockade was lifted against food the Germans could no longer justify its piratical submarine warfare on the basis of English cruelty.<sup>385</sup>

By early August the subject of Belgian relief was hotly contested in Parliament with the British press following their every word. Resoundingly by this point most British politicians

<sup>384</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:59. Loc cit, p. 1:541. On top of these demands the British government expressly stipulated on July 7 that ravitaillement work should not be utilized in any way by the Germans to coerce the working population of Belgium into laboring for the Germans, and stated that in case of such use all arrangements between the British government and the CRB would cease immediately. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 164. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:540. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:176.

<sup>385</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:61-62. The letter also stipulated that the actual executive work of the commission should continue to be presided over by a responsible chairman and directors and that these officials together with all the members of the commission should be of neutral nationality and that their selection should in each case be approved either by Walter Hines Page, Villalobar, or both. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:200. Hoover added that if the blockade of food was dropped by the blockade on contraband and exportations kept the Germans would have to pay for food in gold—causing much injury to the German war effort.

sympathized with the plight of “Belgium the Brave.” In a speech published in the *Yorkshire Herald*, T.P. O’Connor, MP found the Belgians “pre-eminent” in the wartime virtues of patriotism, self-sacrifice, and endurance. In the same edition of the *Herald*, M.P. Sir George Toulmin added that Belgium was “bludgeoned by the Germans.” In Toulmin’s view the German army left those who had not suffered from torture and murder to die from starvation. “Belgium was suffering from a deliberate disregard on the part of Germany of the law of nations,” he concluded.<sup>386</sup>

Over the next few weeks the British press carried numerous speeches and letters detailing the plight of Belgium. The *Huddersfield Chronicle*, the *Universe*, the *Middlesex County Times*, and the *Local Government Chronicle* were among the newspapers that printed a letter written by G.K. Chesterton on current conditions inside Belgium. Focusing on four “truisms,” Chesterton reported that the “badness” of the situation in Belgium was “almost too big to be held in mind.” “If we do not do a great deal more even than we have already done,” he exclaimed, “it may yet be said of us that we left it to the very butchers of this nation to see that it did not bleed to death.” The ice was beginning to break in the court of public opinion. By the middle of August, Emile Francqui received word from the British government that they would permit the import of foodstuffs into Belgium as long as the Germans lived up to their guarantees to respect these supplies. The most crucial component of the authorization was its unlimited character. In this case the British did not require a German guarantee regarding *native* produce—including the 1915 harvest that was just about to start.<sup>387</sup>

<sup>386</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, August 9, 1915.

<sup>387</sup> *Huddersfield Chronicle*, August 9, 1915, *Universe*, August 13, 1915, *Middlesex County Times*, August 14, 1915, *Local Government Chronicle*, August 14, 1915. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 161.

Hoover found the process of negotiating financial assistance for the following year in September 1915 as challenging as any previous exchange despite Britain's limited acquiescence on the subject of foodstuffs granted the month before. During this round the sticking point was the failure of German guarantees in Northern France instead of Belgium. In particular it was said that there was a marked lack of uniformity in the enforcement of crop agreements regarding requisitions for cash payment. Again, the British contended that imports into the Belgian Etapes amounted to provisioning the enemy. Commission director in Brussels Oscar Crosby reported to Hoover on September 14 that whether these contentions were right or wrong the issue threatened to break down ravitaillement. Britain quickly renewed its protests against the requisitioning of the harvest in Northern France. In a letter to Hoover on September 17, Eustace Percy demanded on behalf of the British government that the upcoming harvest be delivered to the civil population without coercion or imposition of any form and coupled with no conditions given by the German army. In a second letter to Hoover on September 30, Percy stated that the minimum concession acceptable to the British was for the French to receive the entire wheat harvest along with a sufficient reserve of animal food for their own stock. Upon receiving this message the chairman realized that his personal intervention in Belgium was required once more.<sup>388</sup>

Hoover's perceptions were correct; the British government embarked on another series of curtailments that began in October and stretched into the spring of 1916. Exaggerated reports of German requisitions collected by the Foreign Office's intelligence service fueled the opposition to relief. By the end of November another set of guarantees covering Britain's concerns proved

<sup>388</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 170. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:562. Loc cit, p. 1:565. Percy added that the British government was well aware of the extortions of "all kinds" that had taken place previously and that it was the job of the commission to guard against the possibility of any use of such methods in the future. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 171. Percy added an objection to the German claims of any rights to seize the food product of France, the forcing of labor, and the complaints of German "excesses" in the region. The issue of labor—forced labor specifically—became an even greater issue in 1916 after the German general government began interning "free-laborers."



insufficient to please the British Foreign Office. In December, Hoover pressured the British to allow an increase in blockade permits from 80,000 tons per month to 126,400 in order to maintain an average daily ration of 1800 calories per person. While sympathetic to the efforts of Hoover and the CRB, the British Foreign Office under the pressure of militarists in England and France instead reduced the allowed tonnage of food by 30,000 per month. As the year ended the commission turned to the Germans again for a new series of guarantees. By this point the circumstances were beginning to change for the occupying forces however as the Germans were beginning to feel the effects of the naval blockade.<sup>389</sup>

Knowing full well the situation, the British government in the final days of December 1915 stepped up its diplomatic pressure on Germany. On December 31, Edward Grey reiterated that the Germans made no attempt to conserve native food stocks. In a statement dated the same day the British government decried that in light of the numerous proven violations of guarantees the permission granted by the Foreign Office to import food supplies was subject to cancellation unless Germany gave explicit promises of reform. The Germans considered the terms quite stiff.<sup>390</sup>

### **Diplomatic Relations with France (1915)**

Negotiations of a different character but of equal importance were carried on concurrently in 1915 regarding the local crops of the Army Zones that included East and West Flanders (the Belgian Étappen) and Northern France. Diplomatically the processes of negotiation were profoundly different than that found elsewhere for the commission. In the Army Zones the CRB negotiated directly with the commanders of the general government

<sup>389</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:556. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 222. Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 1:179. Loc cit, p. 1:186. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 247.

<sup>390</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:137. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:225.

outside of the normal channels of diplomacy. Once agreements were reached the acquisition and distribution of supplies were carried out by six separate army commands without the central organization structure found in Belgium.<sup>391</sup>

Like their British counterparts, the French were equally reluctant to assist the commission. Ultimately they held the position that France could not directly make subventions to the CRB but did pledge their support by promising to reimburse the Belgian government for any funds that it might disburse or pay to the commission for the purchase of foodstuffs in the occupied region. Similar to Britain, the French also held Germany directly accountable for the lives of those in the invaded districts. For this reason both belligerent Allied nations eventually made significant contributions to the commission.<sup>392</sup>

Initially the commission was hesitant to take on the extra burden and responsibility of feeding Northern France. Hoover stated publicly in early January 1915 that it was up to the French government to support its own people. The major stumbling block for the chairman was the refusal of the French to contribute towards the feeding of its citizens in the occupied territories. Hoover reported that while the CRB was not averse to taking up the work the commission felt that because its labor was voluntary the least that the French government could do was give a cash subvention to the cause. The commission waited through the rest of January and into February 1915 for word from the French government that they would provide governmental assistance to the CRB in occupied France. Hoover told Walter Hines Page on January 26 that if the people of this region were about to starve and if the French government

<sup>391</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:560. Loc cit, p. 1:560-561.

<sup>392</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 142. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:397.

wanted these people to be fed all they had to do was make a formal request to the commission and it would take the matter in hand with the same enthusiasm displayed in Belgium.<sup>393</sup>

During February the situation in Northern France became more acute. On February 17, Hoover told President Henry Poincare that the commission's goal was to keep the population alive until the war was over. Due to the recent financial strain placed on the commission it would be unable to direct any foodstuffs into the occupied territory after March 1 if a government subsidy was not arranged however. Similar to the situation in Belgium, the CRB could not sustain its support of 400,000 in Northern France without assistance. Hoover explained to Poincare that the commission was also in jeopardy of complete failure owing to a lack of shipping. "It is of no use dividing the food between the Belgians and the French in order that all may die," the chairman warned. "In the interest of common humanity," Hoover concluded, "if the French government can help us financially we will feed these people."<sup>394</sup>

Several days later the French government partially conceded to the commission's appeal. On February 23 Minister of Finance M. Ribot declared that while France could not give formal approval for CRB funding it would furnish money to the Belgian government. With this promise the Finance Minister asked that the 400,000 people already being fed by the commission should not be deprived of their food supply and that the CRB should press the Belgian government for any further funds it would need for the region. A month later the agreement was finalized. At a meeting in Paris on March 22 the French government announced that it wished to have no official relations with both the CRB and the Comité National, but would be grateful for the two organizations to kindly help the civil population of its occupied territory. Four days later on

<sup>393</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 139, Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:395-396. Loc cit, p. 1:396.

<sup>394</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:438. Hoover added that this could not be done without a good deal of privation, especially to the classes that had more than others. Loc cit, p. 1:398. Loc cit, p. 1:398-399. Loc cit, p. 2:438. Loc cit, p. 1:399.

March 26 the Belgian government under the approval of Paris advanced 25 million francs to the CRB. The money was earmarked for the immediate purchase of provisions for Northern France.<sup>395</sup>

While the French refused to give direct assistance to the commission it became one of the strongest supporters of the CRB. Throughout the rest of the war the French government insisted that the commission should be able to continue its work and that the people of Belgium and Northern France should be fed in spite of all political and diplomatic obstacles that appeared. At the beginning of its operations in the occupied territory the commission had five months' relief experience in Belgium to apply to the situation. This familiarity enabled the CRB to secure in April 1915 a much more comprehensive guarantee than had been possible in Belgium when at the time it was impossible to foresee all the matters on which agreements depended. During negotiations Hoover addressed any misconceptions about relief work the French government may have harbored, explaining that all activities were done voluntarily and that any profits made off of the sale of foodstuffs would be directly reinvested in the destitute. While there were some minor disagreements regarding the appointment of trustees and warehouse managers handling ravitaillement in the region, on April 13 the new deal defined the relationship between the commission, the French committees, and the German authorities went into effect.<sup>396</sup>

<sup>395</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 142, Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:400. Ribot added that the French government was unwilling to undertake feeding of its people in the occupation zones because to do so put into the minds of Germany the argument that since France was permitted to feed its citizens the Germans should be allowed to feed its people too. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 147 and Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:406. Loc cit, p. 1:409. The advance was a loan that the French government pledged to reimburse later.

<sup>396</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 147. Nevertheless, between August and November 1915 the French Government declined to give the commission strong support in the discussions respecting local crops. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:569. Ibid, 2:425. Loc cit, p. 1:419. Loc cit, p. 1:411 and Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 328.

Through a complex series of negotiations the basic agreements regarding the importation of foods in Belgium and Northern France were in place by the beginning of 1916. The year 1915 was particularly significant to the diplomatic history of the commission because the deals it forged served as a transition from inconsistent set of early-war agreements into a steady base agreements and stipulations that served as a sturdy base for the commission's operations and future negotiations. A key centerpiece to these agreements was the securing of native harvests and the protection of imports from requisition. While the developments of the war would change the circumstances under which all interested parties operated in 1916, 1917, and 1918; the baseline requirements remained relatively unchanged.

The year 1915 was also critical for the progress made by the commission in terms of securing governmental funding. With the CRB constantly teetering on the edge of failure in regards to supplies and the funding to pay for it the commission worked quickly to establish a solid reputation of honesty, integrity, and efficiency in Britain. While the commission existed as a private benevolent institution it recognized early on that it could not exist on localized funding efforts. For the first two and a half years of the war the British and French governments provided the subsidies critical for the CRB's survival until the U.S. government became directly involved in 1917. Without the diplomatic concessions won by the commission on all fronts during 1915 the CRB quite possibly would not have survived war.

## CHAPTER NINE: *Dealing with “Endless Difficulties”*

### Diplomatic Relations with Germany (October 1914-December 1915)

Negotiations with the Germans completed the diplomatic circle between belligerent governments and the commission. In theory the importations agreed upon by the Germans and the CRB in late 1914 were supposed to supplement local products in sufficient supply to provide the people of the occupied regions a ration adequate to maintain health. On this supposition the Allies believed that all ravitaillement efforts were predicated on guarantees by the Germans abstaining from local requisitions and to reserving harvests for the civil population. All the while Allied worries about the certainty of German guarantees and their willingness to comply were anything but baseless. Brand Whitlock complained that Germany violated The Hague Conventions no less than four times between October 1914 and March 1915 by imposing war indemnities, fines, and taxes on Belgium.<sup>397</sup>

The issue of who assumed the ultimate responsibility for feeding Belgium quickly became a critical point of debate. The French and the British held the position that the invading Germans were compelled to support the Belgian civil population. In November, General von Frankenburg argued that the contrary was true; explaining that while Belgium was not self-sustaining in its food supply in times of peace it was able to obtain supplies in Holland and elsewhere. He added that an “inter-communal commission” had been organized at their suggestion to make sure all districts were supplied. In a separate argument von Frankenburg ostensibly turned the argument for American relief on its head, asserting that if the U.S. had not

<sup>397</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:509. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:568-569. Initially, Brussels was fined five million francs for allegedly assaulting a German functionary. On December 16, Germany imposed an indemnity of 480 million francs, payable in monthly payments of 42 million. On January 16, 1915 the governor-general imposed a tax on refugees equivalent to 10x the personal taxes they paid. On March 12 the city of Brussels was fined 500,000 marks for refusing to repair the road from Brussels to Malines. Loc cit, p. 1:568-569.

been so “tender-hearted” and if the food supply would have run out the Germans surely would have considered it their duty to import food.<sup>398</sup>

The commission knew full well that Germany faced harsh public criticisms that undermined any international support it possessed. In late November 1914, Hoover seized on negative perceptions and German sympathetic attitudes towards American relief by appealing for a twenty million mark per month subvention. According to Hoover the subsidy was critical to the Germans because it would “immediately silence” any criticisms relating to their lack of sympathy for those suffering in Belgium. Moreover, it would motivate the French and British governments to act likewise in order to support their contentions. While the German general government refused to provide direct assistance, they did sign the first in a series of guarantees protecting native supplies on December 31. After taking effect on January 21, 1915 the agreement was supplemented later in the summer, including a July 4 promise to leave the forthcoming Belgian harvest of breadstuffs to the civil population with a supplemental letter written by General von der Lancken promising to enforce previous requisition and harvest contracts. Agreements on paper did not always mean compliance in deed however. After signing the first series of agreements the Germans failed to set up a mechanism by which these promises could be monitored. Generally, the Germans agreed it was wrong to seize commission supplies but felt quite differently about the food produced within Belgium believing strongly in the rights of the conqueror over the conquered.<sup>399</sup>

The Germans seemingly nonchalant view towards enforcing their guarantees was juxtaposed by a strong interest in the flow of relief goods and the system of distribution put in

<sup>398</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 81. As the only government in Belgium for the time being von Frankenburg believed that it was their duty to “see that the people do not starve.”

<sup>399</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:223. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 278. Withington, *In Occupied Belgium*, p. 125. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:238. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 277-278. Loc cit, p. 278.

place by the commission. When negotiations began again in early 1915 the CRB incorrectly estimated that the military authorities would prefer not to be troubled with the issue of transportation. Whitlock observed that the general government seemed committed to refusing the turning over of the Belgian harvest to the native population or even to the commission. Throughout 1915 it appeared that while the Germans eventually agreed that the native crop should be given to Belgium they were determined to keep it in their own hands as long as possible and dole it out at specified intervals.<sup>400</sup>

Beyond initial agreements the issue of native foods proved the most difficult point of negotiation between the commission and the Germans. As the British predicted it was not difficult to induce Germany to make a promise—the real vexatious regarded distribution. Arguments in this case centered upon the CRB’s desire to distribute crops by region squaring off against German demand to centralize the process under their close supervision. Complicating the situation was the time sensitive nature of the debate. The CRB clearly understood that the two sides needed to reach an agreement satisfactory to British before they rescinded support. In early 1915 when Hoover discussed alternative means of financing relief in Berlin and Brussels the question of native produce again rose to the fore. The chairman knew that German assurances regarding native crops would literally have to be engraved on the face of certificates before Allied and neutral nations would consider offering assistance.<sup>401</sup>

In the end an agreement regarding native produce was reached in what Whitlock called “just the nick of time,” with contentious issues regarding the mode of distribution being left for a later time. The new Governor-General von der Lancken both reaffirmed previous assurances given by von der Goltz and issued new requisition promises. The new guarantees came at a

<sup>400</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:653.

<sup>401</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:138. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:521.



fortunate moment when the commission was under intense scrutiny from external sources claiming that the Germans were seizing all foodstuffs and that work ought to be stopped. Beyond promising to refrain from interfering with supplies the Germans added provisions assuring American representatives of the CRB full liberty of action in supervising distribution and promising that food ships en route to Belgium would be immune from attack. In addition, the general government asserted that “no German soldier would ever think of violating these guarantees more than any other military order” and that if violations occurred they would be investigated and dealt with by military authorities in the same way as other infractions. Using this clause shrewdly, the Germans claimed that any attempts to inspect or oversee whether these orders were observed were unnecessary and moreover an intrusion into military matters of a purely domestic nature.<sup>402</sup>

Complications aside, the commission insisted that the Germans leave the native products of Belgium for the civil population and the Germans promised to do so. Under the agreement the commission seized grains while other articles of food produced domestically were sold in the usual way through local markets. While the deal was a sign of progress it was less than perfect. In Belgium, basic rations were supplied and the rich still could buy almost anything they wanted. Many continued to live as they did before, only now it became more costly to do so. The final agreement between the commission and Germany for 1915-1916 set an increased ration of 100 grams of flour and 200 grams of potatoes per day per capita for Belgians. In Northern France the totals were slightly different, allowing 150 grams per day of flour, 20 grams per day of rice, 20 grams per day of beans or peas, 20 grams per day of coffee, 10 grams per day of salt, 10 grams

<sup>402</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:138. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:538 and Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 2:39-40. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:539. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 2:39-40. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 132.

per day of sugar, 30 grams per day of lard, and 30 grams per day of bacon. The total cost of these rations to the consumer was estimated at 35 centimes per day or approximately 10 francs per month. The CRB estimated that it would require approximately 22 million francs to provide this program.<sup>403</sup>

The chairman's visit to Berlin in early 1915 marked an important step towards securing guarantees for the upcoming year. In early February, Hoover asked the German government to confirm its previous promises that all imported foodstuffs would be free from requisition, seizure, or interference by military authorities and that these supplies should be the property of the civil population exclusively. The commission also desired that the foodstuffs should be free from all import duties and taxes. In its final requests the CRB wanted freedom of movement for delegates to supervise distribution and guarantee neutrality and that all ships carrying relief should be protected from attack. Going beyond the usual demands, Hoover added that considering the Allies newly-pledged financial support for the commissions' program of 60,000 tons per month of relief the Germans should in turn abandon their monthly indemnity of forty million francs and promise to end all other levies or taxes during the remainder of their occupation.<sup>404</sup>

On February 4, Hoover summarized the points the Germans conceded to when he was in Berlin. Leading the list was the recognition by both parties that if the civil population was to be kept from starvation the amount of imports must not only be maintained but probably increased. Germany for its part recognized that the feeding of this population was of the greatest military importance to the Germans "for a starving population on the lines of communication would be

<sup>403</sup> Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 4:164. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 207.

<sup>404</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 117. Loc cit, p. 117 and Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:47. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 117.

the greatest menace.” The chairman also discussed with the Imperial Government the fact that without governmental aid of some kind the commission would fall far behind the necessities of life. The commission subsequently argued that without support from the German government all ravitaillement efforts would fail. In its official statement, the commission explained that as a component of the CRB’s sole desire to ameliorate the conditions of helpless Belgians it felt that it should receive considerations from Germany commensurate to previous commitments made.<sup>405</sup>

The issue of finance also dominated Hoover’s conversations in Berlin. Throughout these meetings the chairman was particularly frustrated by the Germans reluctance to subsidize Belgian relief. In his conversation with Imperial Finance Minister Dr. Karl Helfferich, Hoover explained the voluntary character of the commission’s work, the philanthropic origin of its funds, the additions made to it from Belgian sources, and the vital importance from a military point of view that the CRB should continue its work. The chairman also made it clear to the Finance Minister that unless it was properly recognized and helped out by the German government the commission would dwindle down to a service completely unable to serve millions of people in Belgium and Northern France. Afterward the meeting concluded he complained that Dr. Helfferich failed to realize that as the money received from Belgium through the sale of foodstuffs disappeared the problem would evolve into one of raising forty million marks per month for at least the next twelve months. Hoover felt that the Germans had to offer their assistance because it was absolutely beyond the CRB’s capacity to raise 100 million dollars through existing channels of funding. “What is the use of pouring money into Belgium in order to enable the German army to extract the last drop of blood from these people?” Hoover asked

<sup>405</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:243. Loc cit, p. 1:243-244. Loc cit, p. 1:244. Loc cit, p. 1:245.

after the meeting concluded. As a final argument the chairman endeavored to explain that general sentiments in the United States were not pro-Britain but instead were pro-Belgian and that as long as the Germans continued to put itself in the wrong it was absolutely impossible for them to secure American sentiment.<sup>406</sup>

Despite the difficulties Hoover press forward with his appeal for the Germans to cancel all indemnities against Belgium. Again the chairman found the German commitment to war levies unrelenting. In a meeting with German Minister of Foreign Affairs Herr von Jagow he was told that the Germans could not abandon the monthly indemnity against Belgium. At the moment Hoover despaired over the possible impact that the commission was having on the issue, observing that apparently the levies were assessed only after the work of the CRB was well established. He worried that the commission was directly to blame for the affliction because if the people of Belgium would have been in bad of a position as Poland the fines might never have been imposed. As with the Finance Minister, Hoover declared to von Jagow that if the Germans would take a generous position and release Belgium from its monthly indemnity it would do more to win American opinion than any other act.<sup>407</sup>

Hoover in his final round of discussions in Berlin met directly with Chancellor Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg on February 7. In the beginning of their talks the Chancellor stated emphatically that the Germans would never give up the indemnity while on the other hand they recognized the necessary character of relief and were prepared to find some other method of financial assistance. Bethmann-Hollweg further asserted that in the face of both world and German public opinion they could not for one moment retreat from an act fully confirmed under The Hague Conventions. Hoover then stepped up the diplomatic pressure after hearing the same

<sup>406</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:246. Loc cit, p. 1:249-250. Loc cit, p. 1:250.

<sup>407</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:251. Loc cit, p. 1:252.

bullheaded argument for the third time in as many days. He told the Chancellor that upon his arrival back in London the British government would immediately demand to know whether the Germans had accepted the commission's proposal and that the chairman would be compelled to inform them that it was refused. Upon hearing this news the British would announce to the world that they had offered to pay for the feeding of Belgium themselves if the Germans would have withdrawn their indemnity claims and added that once the statement went public the United States would not facilitate in the matter. Hoover then went a step further in his argument saying that the issue might give Britain reason to withdraw from relief responsibilities completely. In the chairman's view the only solution was for the two belligerent governments to meet half way.<sup>408</sup>

Although Hoover was unable to convince the Germans to abandon indemnities he returned from Berlin with a stronger series of guarantees and an emboldened attitude. In Brussels, the chairman sent a letter to Governor-General von Bissing reminding him that relief work continued despite complaints by the British that ravitaillement was a great advantage to the Germans and a disadvantage to the Allies. Hoover also reminded von Bissing that after nearly four months of work there was not one bona fide report of abuse or misconduct by commission representatives. On those grounds he warned that unless friendly and trustworthy relations could be established between the CRB and German authorities the commission would be compelled to withdraw the stream of food imports and terminate its work.<sup>409</sup>

The response to Hoover's letter by von Bissing was both quick and decisive. As far as guarantees were concerned the governor-general assured the CRB of faithful adherence to all promises. On February 20, a detailed response informed Hoover that he shared the chairman's

<sup>408</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:253.

<sup>409</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:48. Loc cit, p. 1:48-49. Loc cit, 1:49.

opinion that there was a strong need for friendly and cordial cooperation between the Germans and the commission. General von Bissing added that in order to maintain this both sides needed to strictly adhere to regulations regarding the freedoms of delegates. Extending an olive branch he promised that representatives of the commission would not be searched unless it warranted by well rounded suspicions or directly ordered by the general government itself. On March 5, American Minister Henry Van Dyke at The Hague reported that the Germans were now anxious to give every possible support to the commission, offering the CRB safe conduct passes across the English Channel.<sup>410</sup>

Brand Whitlock worked in concert with Chairman Hoover to keep the pressure turned up on General von der Lancken. “It would be easier to feed milk to a lamb in a cage between a lion and tiger than to feed the Belgians between the Germans and the British,” Whitlock told von der Lancken on March 11. The Minister’s primary complaint about both belligerents was that each government seemed to think that they were doing America a favor by permitting the commission to spend \$8 million dollars a month to feed Belgians. By mid-March the Governor-General acknowledged that foodstuffs of all kinds imported by the Comité National were exclusively reserved for the civil population but countered that he could not agree with the interpretation that all products from the soil should be free from requisition. General von Bissing added to his position several complaints about rumors involving war munitions smuggling on CRB ships. In particular it was rumored that both the *Doria* and the *Aymeric* discharged arms in Britain before arriving with relief supplies in Rotterdam.<sup>411</sup>

<sup>410</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:258. Loc cit, p. 1:50. Loc cit, p. 1:50-51. Loc cit, p. 1:50. *New York Times*, Mar 5, 1915, p. 3.

<sup>411</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:107. Loc cit, p. 2:108. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 122. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:107-108, 113.

In the meantime the Allied governments pressured the Germans themselves, in this case demanding that the general government surrender the entire native crop of Belgium and Northern France. The main issue complicating negotiations regarding indigenous crops in both 1915 and 1916 proved to be the fact that German soldiers cultivated fields in some districts and provided seed, labor, and beasts of burden in others—validating their claim to domestic yields. The chairman recommended that the first step in this process required Ambassador James Gerard in Berlin to secure an estimate of harvest from German authorities and the proportion which they claim was raised by their work. The next phase involved taking these figures into consideration and working with Walter Hines Page to secure an agreement satisfactory to the Allied governments. For his part General von Bissing extended his requisition guarantees to Northern France on March 21. Hoover knew that the stakes regarding the 1915 harvest were high. On March 27 he told Ambassador Gerard that if the present military situation continued there was “nothing in God’s world” that will save Belgium except for their own produce, and “if these are going to be taken away from them we may just as well throw up our hands today as next August.”<sup>412</sup>

No sooner had the commission secured promises to protect foodstuffs and subsidies from the Allies that it was plunged into the more difficult series of negotiations to protect the native crop of 1915 and establish a program of imports and rations for 1915-1916. In early-April a convention held in Brussels worked out the initial details regarding produce in Belgium and France. At the meeting the supreme command of the German army consented to the commission’s program of ravitaillement for Northern France and promised that all goods imported for relief would be free from seizure. The concession came with a caveat however.

<sup>412</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:417, 587. Loc cit, p. 1:587. Loc cit, p. 1: 410 and Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 148. Loc cit, p. 159.

The agreement stipulated that if military exigencies required the deal could be cancelled by the German Governor-General at any time without giving reason. On April 19 representatives of both groups (Oscar Crosby for the commission and Major von Kessler for the Germans) signed the agreement extending American relief into the German Zone of occupation in France, adding 140,000 people to relief efforts.<sup>413</sup>

While the agreement marked progress in the relations between occupational forces and the CRB it did not alleviate many of the problems the commission currently faced. The issue of the 1915 harvest crop continued to loom large in the minds of commission members. Hoover reported to Ambassador Gerard on May 1 that if the Germans wanted to keep the CRB alive it needed to make a broad and immediate commitment to reaching an agreement regarding all foodstuffs within the occupation zone. The chairman recommended that if the commission was going to continue on after the harvest it needed to secure definite support as soon as possible. Four days later Gerard relayed Hoover's message to von Jagow almost verbatim. The American Ambassador also informed the German Minister that if the Imperial Government complied with the request for protection of the native crop throughout both Belgium and Northern France the CRB was confident that it could create an institution for financially securing the endeavor.<sup>414</sup>

General von Bissing responded personally to the inquiry on May 13, a few days after the sinking of the *Lusitania*. The Governor-General reported that naturally he was concerned about the upcoming harvest but wanted to secure ownership of the yield for his soldiers and government. In regards to helping Belgium and agriculture in general, von Bissing found it

<sup>413</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 123. Loc cit, p. 150 and Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:414. In working out the details it was stipulated that food would be distributed according to the commission's program in conjunction with the German military authorities by French trustees who were nominated by both groups (the CRB and the Germans). Loc cit, p. 1:415. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 315.

<sup>414</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 160. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:531.



impossible to offer assistance for the reason that Belgian practices were advanced far behind those of Germany. Whitlock was displeased with the response. While Germans did some agricultural work and provided limited assistance the seeds that were planted in Belgium were sent by the American commission and were cared for by peasants on their own land in their own way. He reported that no one, except possibly for von Bissing himself, thought that the Germans were responsible for the domestic crop.<sup>415</sup>

In June, Hoover pressed forward with negotiations regarding the upcoming harvest. The chairman worried that the intervention of the Germans would remove the character of neutrality and privacy from relief work and would imperil the very existence of the Comité National as the French, Belgian, and British governments would be forced to decide that the committee and the commission no longer possessed the necessary independence to see that ravitaillement was performed properly. Having brought considerable pressure on the Germans from different quarters to prevent requisitioning, Hoover again went to Brussels to take the matter up personally with German authorities. As a last resort the chairman was prepared to take his appeal straight to the Imperial Government in Berlin once more. On June 10, Hoover wrote Ambassador Gerard detailing his desire to take the issue of crop requisitions with the Kaiser himself, thinking that in a personal interview the chairman could possibly settle all the hard points. The final measure was not necessary. Hoover found the Germans in a more conciliatory mood than before.<sup>416</sup>

Nevertheless, Hoover was still frustrated with the Germans. In the days before the meeting the chairman was furious over the treatment of commission delegates by German forces.

<sup>415</sup> Marquis Villalobar discussed the *Lusitania* incident with the Governor-General who according to Whitlock “made the usual excuses” saying it was Britain’s fault. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:141. Loc cit, p. 2:146.

<sup>416</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 194. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:534. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:159. Gerard reported back that the idea of meeting the Kaiser was not necessarily the best strategy. Gerard responded to Hoover’s inquiry that he recently had a meeting with the Kaiser and was so “grossly insulted” that he would never speak to him again. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:534.

Whitlock reported that Hoover was so worked up he threatened to withdraw altogether, spelling the end of the commission because Britain relied wholly on the chairman's advice on ravitaillement. The chairman knew that he could not withdraw personally on a whim, but at the time was more than willing to make use of the threat.<sup>417</sup>

The much anticipated harvest negotiations started on June 15 with a meeting between Whitlock and General von der Lancken. Following the guidelines set by Hoover months before, the Germans informed the CRB that the new crop would provide approximately one-fifth of the Belgians food supply. Whitlock responded that the general government had two options: one, give one-fifth to the Belgians and allow the commission to import the other four-fifths or two, take the one-fifth native crop and import from Germany the remaining four-fifths to make up the deficit. The General immediately questioned that if they surrendered the one-fifth to the commission what assurances would they have that once consumed the British wouldn't intervene. Whitlock in return promised to provide satisfactory assurance from Britain on the subject.<sup>418</sup>

Two days later on June 17 the two principles reached an agreement. On the German side they agreed that to surrender the Belgian crop to the civil population and consented to the continuation of relief by the Comité National and the CRB. The two parties also agreed that the Comité National and the CRB would continue to import foodstuffs into Belgium until the harvest of 1916. In return the Governor-General retained in his possession the portion of the 1915 grain harvest used for bread making. While concessions were granted the agreement was of

<sup>417</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:162. The problem Whitlock said, and Hoover knew it, was that he couldn't retire and let the poor Belgians starve unless the Dutch were willing to take up the work.

<sup>418</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:163. Loc cit, p. 2:163-164. Loc cit, p. 2:164.

tremendous importance because it not only saved the local harvest for the Belgians but it also rescued the commission from disaster.<sup>419</sup>

The difficult task remaining for Hoover was to work out a formula for applying the agreements given the current demands of both the Germans and the British. Whitlock himself agreed that the next stage of negotiations would not be easy. He reported that getting the general-government to leave the harvest for the Belgians was not difficult; the real problems arose when debate began on the scheme of distribution. In negotiations General von Bissing demanded that despite the agreement the Comité National would not be allowed to give special instructions directly to the communes and would not be able to make inquiries, send interrogatory lists or circulars, or compile statistics without first consulting with the German civil commissioner. This request in particular put the commission at a disadvantage. Edward Eyre Hunt recalled on June 26 that although he made an estimate as to the damages occasioned by the war he was no longer allowed to make inquiries into the subject of requisitions. Equally frustrating was the sudden inability of committee inspectors to make statements about the excesses of the general-government outside of abuses committed by millers. Whitlock believed that the information blackout was done deliberately as part of a greater attempt by the Germans to seize the funds of the Comité National.<sup>420</sup>

In early July the Germans clarified their position regarding the upcoming harvest. On July 4, General von Bissing confirmed that the general government would hold at the disposal of

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<sup>419</sup> Whitlock reported the deal first on June 17. Hoover followed with a memorandum detailing the agreement on June 18. General von Bissing made an announcement regarding the German agreement on June 25. All three reports contained the same information. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:166. Loc cit, p. 2:168 and Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 162. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:168 and Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 162-163. The deal related to wheat and rye bread specifically. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:534.

<sup>420</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:534-535. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:167. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:56. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 309. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:174.

the Belgian civil population the product of the grain harvest used to make wheat and rye breads while the Comité national and the CRB would continue to import relief foodstuffs until the harvest of 1916. Two days later the mechanics of the agreement were worked out in detail. An important feature of the deal in regards to enforcement involved the duties of the German Étappen-Inspektion agency. Under its jurisdiction the general-government assured the commission that the inspection agency would give strict orders to subordinates that relief supplies were not to be seized. Similar to other promises, the Étappen-Inspektion reserved the right to cancel the new agreement at any time.<sup>421</sup>

Beyond reaffirming its previous promises the Germans offered another important concession. On July 7, the general government assured the commission that they would handle the question of administration in accordance with The Hague Conventions. The announcement was met with skepticism in Britain especially. Taking recent events into account the British Foreign Office saw little evidence that the Germans were taking active steps to assist the commission and moreover they were using agreements against the completion of ravitaillement. In an official response to recent German promises, the Foreign Office complained that the scarcity of foodstuffs in Belgium was a deliberate result of German requisitions and that recent guarantees made to end such practices merely excluded a small list of articles from seizure. Even more troubling to the British were allegations that general-government took advantage of the commission by depriving Belgians of their native products. The Foreign Office charged that the German government by their actions and attitudes showed their determination to divest themselves of all responsibility to the civil population.<sup>422</sup>

<sup>421</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:539. Loc cit, p. 2:439.

<sup>422</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 195. Loc cit, p. 163.

British denunciations of German behavior in Belgium were accompanied with a new series of Allied demands governing relief work. Whitlock in a meeting with von der Lancken on July 16 informed the General that chief among Britain's requirements were that the feeding of Belgians and the Germany Army were to be kept completely separate—especially in regards to cereals. The British also demanded that the Belgian population received the total benefit of secours provided by the Comité National and that in providing this service the two relief committees (the Comité National and the CRB) should enjoy liberty of action at all times in accordance with their mission. On the issue of labor, Britain also stated that the German authorities were prohibited from using the Comité National and the CRB as a means to force to civil population into working either directly or indirectly for the benefit of the Imperial Army.<sup>423</sup>

The steady stream of criticisms had an immediate impact on the general government in Belgium. In the face of resolute opposition from the Comité National, protests from Whitlock and Villalobar, and the uncompromising attitude of the British, General von der Lancken became more willing to modify his position. On July 29, the Governor-General gave an oral commitment to the commission that he was giving up on efforts to control the CRB and the Comité National directly. Concurrently the Germans issued several other assurances regarding foodstuffs, including an agreement to resell 100 grams of supplies per day to the entire population of Northern France without profit and to provide 200 grams of potatoes per day per person. In early August the Germans added a provision to include a daily per capita ration of 100 grams per day of indigenous flour in occupied France.<sup>424</sup>

As was demonstrated throughout 1915 the process of negotiations involving food supplies was both ongoing and subject to change. In early fall the commission resumed talks

<sup>423</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:546.

<sup>424</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 195. Loc cit, p. 169. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:431.

with the general government under a new series of British restrictions stemming from two German decrees regarding animal fodder issued July and August. To date the allies allowed the commission to freely import supplies in quantities stipulated by necessity and the amount of financing available. Now the British Foreign Office closely scrutinized the relief program in detail and only authorized shipments that it approved. Negotiations in the fall of 1915 were also of increasing importance in regards to German guarantees. Following the general government's announcement that they would return a specified percentage of local crops the commission took up the task of securing as high of a return to the civil population as possible.<sup>425</sup>

Once negotiations began Hoover became personally engaged in the discussions regarding indigenous crops. In particular the question of produce in Northern France was a critical hinge point. Complicating matters further was the fact that these crops were not covered by the guarantees secured during the summer. Further stressing nerves was the British refusal to allow any more food into regions where peasants raised the entire crop unless the Germans relaxed their seizures of foodstuffs. After some discussion Germany agreed to make concessions regarding animal fodder (a sticking point for the British), but refused to turn over the whole crop of cereals to the civil population.<sup>426</sup>

After months of laborious negotiations a final breakthrough in the discussion of indigenous products was reached in October 1915. Hoover hastened to break the deadlock by claiming that the commission could not extend its activities as long as German officials seemed unwilling to cooperate with the work already underway. American Minister Hugh Gibson aided the cause by impressing upon Baron von der Lancken the point that the commission had put up

<sup>425</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:553-554. Loc cit, p. 1:554. For example, as early as August 1915 the British Foreign Office demanded that Hoover cease the importation of corn into Belgium. Loc cit, p. 1:569.

<sup>426</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 2:76, Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:209. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 170.

with bad treatment and many serious outrages for many months and the time had come when the CRB could no longer ask American volunteers to subject themselves to that sort of treatment anymore. He added that Hoover and his colleagues were seriously thinking about withdrawing from Belgium. The direct result of this pressure was the creation of the *Vermittlungsstelle* to regularize relations between the commission and German authorities. In addition, General von Bissing guaranteed that Belgian boats chartered in Holland for the purpose of relief work would not be requisitioned by the military. Finally, after making a series of counter-proposals the Germans agreed to turn the whole crop of wheat in Flanders over to the civil population. The agreement was a major victory for the commission.<sup>427</sup>

On the heels of the Flanders concessions the commission faced a new series of complications in Belgium through a series of espionage charges leveled by the German general government. Speaking on behalf of the commission, Hugh Gibson responded on November 8 that in over a year of work the CRB fulfilled its duties as a neutral scrupulously and that there had yet to be a single confirmed incident of improper action by any of its members. Gibson added that if there was evidence of improper behavior that he and Hoover would be the first to insist that the individual resign their position and leave the country immediately. As was the case a month before Hoover threatened to end all relief efforts if von der Lancken did not consider withdrawing the charge of espionage. In October, the chairman used threats of retirement to successfully improve relations between the CRB and the general staff in Northern

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<sup>427</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:72. Loc cit, p. 1:74. Gibson also informed von der Lancken that the only reason why the British allowed the shipment of food into Belgium was because of public pressure and to avoid giving the Germans the opportunity to say that the British were starving its allies. According to Gibson “the American people would not for one moment stand that men engaged in work which in effect represented the American people should lower the dignity of their country by acceptance of such treatment.” Loc cit, p. 1:73. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 213. Loc cit, p. 172.

France. Hoover at this juncture desired to use the same pressure to steady relations in Belgium as well.<sup>428</sup>

In a meeting with Baron von der Lancken the commission addressed issues well beyond those of espionage charges. On November 30, Gibson complained that conditions under which Belgium were being fed were rapidly deteriorating and that the entire work of the CRB was threatened in many directions by the behavior of the Germans. He lamented that instead of offering sympathetic cooperation and maintaining the spirit of the guarantees it signed the German authorities were placing “endless difficulties” in the way of the commission’s work. Standing firm, Gibson pointed out that the CRB did not want to withdraw and would be happy to remain in Belgium if a satisfactory solution could be found allowing the commission to be treated as “gentlemen.”<sup>429</sup>

Hoover used the incident as an opportunity to demonize the Germans and celebrate the virtues of the commission. Responding to the charges the chairman emphasized the fact that the lives of ten million people depended on the continuance of the commission and that its representatives were “Americans of the best type.” Because these individuals truly represented the American people the CRB would not tolerate any treatment incompatible with personal dignity and self respect. To Hoover the very idea of espionage was simply abhorrent in the view of the nature of the work. As commission member T.B. Kittredge described it, the chairman viewed the commission as “more Catholic than the Pope.” The pressure of Hoover and the

<sup>428</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 226. Loc cit, p. 227. Loc cit, p. 226. Loc cit, p. 227.

<sup>429</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 228. Loc cit, p. 229. Gibson felt that the chief difficulty in this situation was that the Germans failed to designate a competent official to assist the commission and its work even though the work was of such tremendous importance that the President and the Secretary of State in the United States gave it their personal attention.



commission again worked. On December 8, Baron von der Lancken withdrew the allegations of espionage.<sup>430</sup>

While at the time the incident created some tense moments in the long term it served to regularize relations between the CRB and the Germans through the *Vermittlungsstelle*. In addition the episode provided for the first time a direct means of cooperation between the commission and the general government. Once in place the officers of the *Vermittlungsstelle* were men of high character who had extensive experience in dealing with Americans. Their attitudes were almost uniformly sympathetic towards the commission and overall these officers were unyielding in their efforts to assist the CRB in solving the difficult problems that arose from the day-to-day operations of ravitaillement. This union of German officials and CRB representatives marked another step in the improvement of both diplomatic relations and the overall efficiency of the commission.<sup>431</sup>

Although many questions were left unsettled regarding foodstuffs in Belgium and Northern France, the series of negotiations and agreements secured in 1915 by the commission established the baseline for diplomatic relations and guarantees between the CRB and the belligerent governments for the remainder of the war. The first full calendar year of the conflict was diplomatically noteworthy for the vast changes that the program underwent combined with the plethora of changing demands the commission dealt with. Trapped at times between the belligerents, the commission maintained its commitment to the civil population of Belgium and Northern France and through its efforts increases the program of importations during the year. While the CRB admitted that it did not completely win the day in most of its negotiations what it did accomplish in 1915 was impressive nonetheless. Over a span of twelve months the

<sup>430</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 230. Loc cit, p. 233-234.

<sup>431</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 234.

commission established its legitimacy as the official relief agency for Belgium and Northern France, increased its program of imports, secured deals and concessions with both governments in Berlin and London, pressed for liberties among its representatives, and significantly influenced belligerent perceptions regarding Belgian relief.

## CHAPTER TEN: *Responding to “An Appalling Situation”*

The commission found conditions in Belgium most disconcerting as 1915 began. The destruction of property, paralysis of economic life, and the general displacement of peoples that followed the German invasion enormously increased the total number of destitute Belgians. By this point the CRB realized that the chief problem in Belgium was not providing succor for the destitute and the afflicted; it was instead the issue of providing basic foodstuffs for the entire country. As February began the situation was critical. Hoover reported that without CRB imports there would not be one ounce of bread in Belgium today. At the time, 7,000,000 Belgians were surviving on a meager allowance of 250 grams of flour per day. Of this total, about 1,500,000 people were “entirely destitute” and wholly supported by the commission. The chairman estimated that by the time of the fall harvest another 2,500,000 would be added to destitute totals.<sup>432</sup>

The situation was equally troubling in the areas of Northern France recently added to the commission’s responsibilities. In an article appearing in the *New York Times*, Hoover described an “appalling situation” in the Meuse Valley where 10,000 people were “absolutely without food.” A CRB investigation into conditions revealed that a large number of deaths in the Meuse had already occurred due to starvation. Commission member Dr. Vernon Kellogg observed that privation was already taking an enormous toll on the populations of both Belgium and Northern France. The consequences of emaciation included reduction of physical and mental capacity, loss of will power and mental balance, the reappearance of suppressed or controlled diseases,

<sup>432</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:310. Ultimately over seventy-five percent of the population became dependent upon charity. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 4. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:263. Loc cit, p. 1:263-264. In February 1915, the cost of feeding the destitute in Belgium averaged 12 francs a person per month. Loc cit, p. 1:264.

increased infertility, weakening of the immune system, and dramatic increases in mortality and morbidity—especially among the elderly and the young.<sup>433</sup>

Over the first nine months of operation the CRB overcame a series of diplomatic, financial, and physical obstacles to assist the needy. Early 1915 marked a critical juncture in the commission's efforts to assist Belgium, serving as the transition point from the first agreements and guarantees to the actual provisioning of the population under the system created by the CRB. Jump starting the commission's program proved to be anything but easy however. In February, Captain J.F. Lucey reported that when he arrived in Rotterdam the CRB had not received any additional shipments for the past two weeks due mostly to impediments created by the British Foreign Office. Once shipments began flowing into Rotterdam and Brussels the CRB and the Comité National/Français moved quickly to efficiently distribute relief supplies. By July 1915 the programs and organizations handling Belgian relief under the umbrella of the Commission for Relief in Belgium had imported 650,000 tons of provisions costing \$44,000,000. The effort saved an estimated 9,000,000 from famine in the process.<sup>434</sup>

### **The Comité National**

Belgium was in crisis almost immediately after occupation begun. To deal with the situation a Central Relief Committee was hastily formed in Brussels with Brand Whitlock and the Marquis Villalobar y O'Neil as its patrons. The committee was presided over by Ernest Solvay with the assistance of Emile Francqui who immediately enlisted American's Daniel Heineman, William Hulse, and Millard K. Shaler. At a meeting on October 30, 1914 the committee officially changed its name to the Comité National de Secours et d' Alimentation and

<sup>433</sup> *New York Times*, Jan 7, 1915, p. 4. Kellogg, Vernon. *Germany in the War and After*. (New York: MacMillian Company, 1919), p. 39.

<sup>434</sup> *New York Times*, Feb 28, 1915. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:65.

announced that its primary purposes were to centralize relief, fix the prices of merchandise, and look after the delivery of supplies to the communes. By the very nature of its name, the Comité had two responsibilities: relief and provisioning.<sup>435</sup>

A critical component of the Comité National from an organizational perspective was its interaction with provincial committees and local communes. Comprised of mostly Belgians and a select number of American representatives of the CRB, the Comité with its provincial, regional, and communal subcommittees by self-definition was responsible for the distribution of relief throughout Belgium. In establishing a direct relationship with the provincial committees, the Comité National determined that they should maintain constant communication but enjoy complete independence of action except for general executive measures enacted at the top. Additionally, the provincial committees were responsible for assuming an equitable distribution of food and a wise administration of charity. In regards to finance, the local groups were also asked to maintain a running account with sufficient funds to cover at least one month's shipments of food. Summarizing the system, Francqui explained to Hoover on November 23 that the Comité National had the mission of controlling the subcommittees, providing them with food in accord with the CRB, centralizing correspondence and book-keeping, and arranging for the regular payment of goods received.<sup>436</sup>

In a letter to the German general-government the Comité National defined in specific terms what its purposes were. At the center of its duties was the intention to not only aid the poor of Brussels but to also organize relief for other committees that came into existence in other communities. In order to do this, the Comité claimed that it was "unconditionally necessary" to

<sup>435</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 1:lvii. Ernest Solvay was the richest man in Belgium and Francqui was a well respect Belgian banker. Francqui had previously dealt with Heineman, Hulse, and Shaler during Whitlock and Hoover's repatriation efforts of August 1914. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 77. Loc cit, p. 60.

<sup>436</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:465-466. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 77. Loc cit, p. 84.

receive definite assurances from the Germans regarding imports and requisitions. These guarantees were asked to include signed placards for all transport vehicles (everything from wagons to lighters) carrying the order that military authorities would permit and facilitate the shipment of food via rail, canal, and road.<sup>437</sup>

As the arm of relief conducting business directly in Belgium, the Comité National made its organizational structure clear to all interested parties. Edward Eyre Hunt explained that the Comité never sought a monopoly over Belgian relief work and enacted federal—not monopolistic—policies governing the provisioning of relief. Its aim, plain and simple, was relief in Belgium and nothing else. Scores of existing relief groups received patronization and subsidization from the Comité under the guise of humanitarianism and neutrality. From the beginning the Comité believed that its work was a purely Belgian affair to be handled by Belgians exclusively. While assistance from Hoover and the CRB was welcomed enthusiastically, the leadership core of the Comité did not intend for the commission or its representatives to have an executive voice in the control of food or relief in Belgium. At the same time however, the Comité found it an advantage to use the reputation of the CRB to garner support. Throughout the war the tendency of Belgians to give credit to the CRB for the work of relief within Belgium caused immense displeasure within the Comité National. In reality they were the individuals who organized and set the machinery of distribution into action.<sup>438</sup>

By mid-1915 the Comité National and the CRB were working to clearly delineate the responsibilities of each group in an attempt to better define its executive structure. In a meeting between the two groups on July 20, it was decided that for administrative purposes the functions

<sup>437</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 34. The Comité National also asked for passports allowing Shaler and assistants to travel to Holland and Britain to purchase relief supplies.

<sup>438</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 312. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 196. Loc cit, p. 197.

of both institutions should be conducted in three separate departments including provisioning, benevolence, and exchange. Under these stipulations the provisioning department handled the ravitaillement of the entire population while the benevolent section took care of the destitution and the exchange division facilitated financial operations. A month later on August 20, plans regarding the cooperation between the two agencies were finalized along these parameters. Working in the meantime to effectively provide relief, the Comité National put a defined system of rationing into place in October. Under this structure the CRB and the Comité enlisted some 40,000 Belgians to assist in the relief of provinces, districts, and towns.<sup>439</sup>

At the apex of the Comité National were the guiding hands of President Ernest Solvay, Executive Committee Chairman Emile Francqui, and Patron Minister Marquis de Villalobar y O'Neill. As Belgium's richest man and one of its most spirited citizens, Solvay became director and prime mover of the Comité. Having organized a committee for the care of refugees in the first days of August 1914, he took the lead in creating a strong committee of larger scope and influence. In his view the Comité Central needed to be enlarged so as to make it a truly national body operating as a kind of government resting entirely upon good will and voluntary association comprised of representatives from all provinces. While the new committee was to take on a quasi-governmental form, Solvay emphasized the necessity of putting aside the political implications and insisted on absolute impartiality in the distribution of relief.<sup>440</sup>

<sup>439</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 201. Loc cit, p. 204. Loc cit, p. 180. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:lviii.

<sup>440</sup> Vice Presidents of the Comité National included Jean Jadot and L. van der Rest. The executive committee also included CRB members Oscar Crosby, Hugh Gibson, Daniel Heineman, and William Hulse along with Manuel Alonso De Avilla y Barnabeau, Jose Allard, Louis Cousin, E. van Elewyck, Emissary Janssen, Michael Levie, and F. van Bree. The London Times, *History of the War*, p. 443-444. Edward Eyre Hunt first met Villalobar in December of 1914, observing that he was a trained diplomat with keen eyes, charming manners and force of character whose influence with the Belgians was great. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 185. In action, Whitlock observed that Villalobar displayed great personal vanity and sensitiveness to slights, adding that the minister was "the worst of all," undoubtedly engaging in a conspiracy to discredit the Americans and make himself the sole savior of Belgium. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 1:lix-lx and Loc cit, p. 2:253. Whitlock added that for all his charm, Villalobar could show petty jealousy. Loc cit, p. 2:91. Nevertheless, under the proud exterior he had a

One of the central figures in the creation of the Comité was Emile Francqui, a man of strong will and executive capacity who became one of the most capable directors of the *Société Générale de Belgique* (one of the largest banks and financial organizations in Brussels). As one of the directors of the Comité National, his job was complicated by German militarists and British Tories who “made the work of the CRB seem like feeding a lamb placed between a tiger and a lion” according to Whitlock. The American minister observed that Francqui was “wholly fitted by nature, by experience, and by training for the heavy task” and was a man shrewd in judgment, polished in travel, trained in affairs, and possessing relentless will and untiring energy. His tact, wit, good humor, and perseverance were known to solve many delicate problems. Speaking about Francqui, Edward Eyre Hunt found him to be the exception to the rule that great financiers were usually dictators. Moreover, he was the type of business executive familiar to most Americans—self made, brusque, bourgeois, sometimes intolerably rude, but always efficient and the “man of the hour” in Belgian financial affairs. To Hunt, Francqui resembled an American trust magnate and was a man with large ambitions and little sentimentality or cheap ideas of glory.<sup>441</sup>

In looks and in character Emile Francqui was quite different than Hoover. More than a dozen years before the outbreak of war the two men had met in China during the Boxer Rebellion. Francqui was described as a man of strong will and dominant personality that

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sensitive heart and was full of expedients, unlimited resources, and was wholly without fear. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:240. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 12. Loc cit, p. 45. Loc cit, p. 76. Whitlock commented that Emile Francqui and other Belgians did have political ambitions, but did not use the Comité National to advance them during the war. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:lix.

<sup>441</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 12 and Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:346. Founded in 1822 with a capital of 50 million francs, the *Société Générale de Belgique* grew into one of the foremost financial institutions in Belgium with Francqui as its head. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 272. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:91. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:347. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 272. Loc cit, p. 272-273. Hunt also observed that the situation within the Comité National usually called for a dictator in order to make any progress. Hunt called the weekly meetings of the Comité “stage plays purely.” Loc cit, p. 272.



impressed others by his abilities that led others or drove them to follow because they realized that he was the best man to handle a crisis. Both Whitlock and Kittredge saw Francqui as a dominating figure; a man who estimated the standards of the world at their proper value with no illusions as to the motives of people. CRB and Comité National members observed that it was a great tribute to the two men that they were big enough to put aside whatever differences they may have had or what unpleasant memories they may have harbored. In loyal cooperation, Hoover and Francqui devoted themselves to the task before them. Working together the two deserved a large part of the credit for the results achieved according to Kittredge.<sup>442</sup>

From the beginning the work of the Comité National and the CRB was assisted by previously-existing structure within Belgium that performed crucial duties once relief efforts were underway. After the Comité Central expanded into the Comité National it found in the communes an organization for distribution that greatly simplified the task of provisioning. As patron minister, Whitlock proposed in November 1914 that all food should be turned over to the Comité upon arrival in Belgium and that the whole work of supplying should be done by the committees exclusively. To begin its operations the Comité National provided Shaler and Couchman with £20,000 (500,000 francs) to purchase foodstuffs at the lowest possible price to provide bread and soup for the destitute of Brussels. With this money the two Americans were instructed to purchase 500-2,000 tons of flour, 100 tons of beans and peas, and 100-200 tons of rice depending on prices.<sup>443</sup>

Outside observers quickly saw the Comité National as a symbol of the nation's resolve.

According to Hoover the Belgians built up under terrible circumstances a strong institution that

<sup>442</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 48. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:346. Whitlock observed that Francqui was sociable and genial with dignified reserve. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 48.

<sup>443</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:345. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 88. At the time he believed that the CRB would limit itself to investigating reported violations of German agreements. *Ibid*, p. 35.

serves as a rallying point for national sentiment and solidarity undiminished by parallel foreign-based organizations. Commission delegate James Harder added that at Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent, Malines, Liège, and other towns the local committees were harmoniously administered by the national committee. When it became necessary they created canteens and soup kitchens in order to support an ever-increasing number of destitute.<sup>444</sup>

Working in conjunction with each other, the CRB and the Comité National worked to clearly delineate the responsibilities of each organization respectively. At an elementary level they established that the commission purchase and ship foodstuffs to Belgium while the Comité handled distribution down to the communal level. What Emile Francqui really wanted however was for the CRB to send food into Belgium and maintain representation within the country to give prestige to the Comité but be restricted to whatever functions assigned to them by the domestic agency. As an international organization the commission refused to accept these terms unless it knew from its own agents and activities that guarantees with belligerents were being enforced. In the CRB's opinion it was impossible to maintain assurances without possessing independent powers of control and supervision within Belgium over the entire task of ravitaillement. The desire for autonomy did not mean that the Comité wanted the CRB to retire. When Hoover threatened to withdraw the commission from all relief activities in October 1915 the Comité declared that the continuation of the CRB was essential to the entire work of relief and that it was impossible for the organization to retire. This frank recognition of the importance and the necessity of the commission settled for the moment the questions that created friction between the two.<sup>445</sup>

<sup>444</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:106. Taillandier, *The Soul of the "CRB,"* p. 48.

<sup>445</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:48. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 366. Loc cit, p. 201.

The Comité National also struggled with the issue of sovereignty as it related to the German general-government. The only way to prevent abuses by the Germans was to install a strict system of control over local committees and then coerce them into obeying orders. General von Bissing in particular appeared determined that Imperial officials should be able to exercise influence by attending the meetings of subcommittees in charge of local relief. After a series of negotiations the Germans agreed to maintain communications with the president's of subcommittees instead of exercising direct control. Once the commission secured government subsidies the Comité National was able to exercise greater control in Belgium. Structurally, subventions were given to the CRB as the only organization permitted to transfer funds into the country and were then handed over to the Comité National who was expected to distribute the money in accord with instructions given by the Belgian government. Once the procedures were in place the Comité and the commission decided that the chief executives of both organizations would work collaboratively to determine the nature and quantities of foodstuffs to be purchased abroad, the prices that supplies would be sold at within Belgium, and the regulations for distribution of ravitaillement down to the communes.<sup>446</sup>

Once established the Comité National worked in conjunction with the CRB to provide both food and financial support to Belgium. Using the commune system as a base of operations the Comité Central established nearly sixty canteens providing a daily ration of 200 grams of bread and a half-liter of soup per person shortly after the war began. By the end of September 1914, local canteens distributed 120,000 daily rations. For breakfast Belgians ate bread with a little lard and drank a hot mix of roasted grains. At noon adults ate soup and bread from relief

<sup>446</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 191. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:138. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 190. At the time (in early 1915) the sum handed over to the Comité National was £1,000,000 a month (equivalent to approximately 25,000,000 francs). Loc cit, p. 201.

soup lines while children ate a charity-school lunch. For supper families ate rutabagas and some of the soup and bread saved from the noon meal. Daily rations provided by the CRB attempted to approximately 30.5 ounces per day and included 45 grams of protein and 43 grams of fat.<sup>447</sup>

Within weeks the Comité National and the CRB realized the inadequacy of this relief program as it stood. On November 5, Hoover released a statement prepared by Emile Francqui showing that the problem went beyond the problem of supplying food to the unfortunate and unemployed into the a question of provisioning 6 to 7 million people. With its new approach toward relief on a national scale the Comité worked to establish the maximum ration and maximum price for foodstuffs sold to consumers by communal committees. Beyond this the Comité National determined a broad set of principles governing the distribution of relief supplies.<sup>448</sup>

The Comité National and the CRB also worked in concert to coordinate the production of local foodstuffs as a vital supplement to imports. As the staple of the Belgians diet the production of bread was absolutely crucial to their survival. The problem was that grains were in tremendous short supply. Recognizing the situation the CRB and the Comité National contracted with the Belgian milling industry to meet specified costs and quality controls. A key participant in this process was Minnesotan William C. Edgar, editor of the *Northwestern Miller* who upon his arrival in early 1915 suggested that the commission adopt a lower milling percentage below

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<sup>447</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 16. Eventually this ration also fell “far below the necessity of the population” because of deficiencies in overseas transport, not to the actions of the communes. The CRB recognized that due to shortages the communes were compelled ever further to make sure that “they make no disposals otherwise than in the proper manner.” Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:84. Kellogg, *Fighting Starvation in Belgium*, p. 166. Loc cit, p. 162.

<sup>448</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:218. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 84.

the 90-100 percent flour composite currently being used. After much discussion the CRB decided on a more efficient milling percentage of 82 percent.<sup>449</sup>

Beyond foodstuffs the Comité National and the CRB also assumed important financial responsibilities in Belgium. As stipulated in an agreement between the two agencies the Comité took full financial responsibility for all foodstuffs once they entered the commune system for final distribution in both Belgium and Northern France. To support the transaction many wealthy men in the various districts gave personal guarantees for the repayment of funds in case of emergency. In the finance industry the Comité National also established a loan bank to provide funding with proper security at a low rate of 3 percent interest.<sup>450</sup>

One of the larger projects the Comité and the CRB participated in was the creation of an unemployment benefit plan for Belgians in April 1915. Once in place the system greatly supplemented the ordinary relief program and gave the average working class family ample food to survive. The program was not without its criticisms by the Germans however. After the plan expanded to offer nearly three million francs a week to some 750,000 unemployed workmen in Belgium the German general-government became increasingly suspicious of its activities. From the beginning the Germans criticized the program for drawing labor away from the general government. Eventually in 1916 this problem would be remedied by the general-government's highly controversial plan of interning unemployed Belgians for forced labor. In the interim the Comité National tried to avoid arbitrary action by the Germans by distributing unemployment relief in food rather than money.<sup>451</sup>

Under close scrutiny the Comité National worked out the exact details of the unemployment plan in mid-1915. During the developmental phase of the project the Comité

<sup>449</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 85. Loc cit, p. 182.

<sup>450</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 155. Loc cit, p. 17.

<sup>451</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 345. Loc cit, p. 190-191. Loc cit, p. 191.

established two central purposes for the program. The first was to provide a minimum level of assistance including food, clothing, shelter, fuel, and other necessities to maintain the “family life” of the working class. The second part involved the providing of actual employment as a remedy to the rapidly deteriorating morale of Belgian society. Once in place the program stipulated that the Comité provided nine-tenths of funding while the communal administrations covered the remaining one-tenth. Breaking down the provisions, the plan designated that bachelors received three francs per week while heads of households received an additional one and one half francs for his wife or housekeeper and fifty centimes for each child under sixteen living at home and not working. As a measure of protection the communes were required to furnish the provincial committees and the National Committee exact, certified lists of the unemployed subject to frequent examination of benefactors to preventing fraud. Enrollment skyrocketed immediately after the program was put in place totaling over 760,000 initial applicants. Including dependents this figure added up to 1,347,922 people seeking assistance.<sup>452</sup>

### **The Comité Français**

The occupied regions of France were in a similar desperate situation to that of Belgium. In a short period of time two million Frenchmen exhausted their food supplies and faced starvation like their Belgian neighbors. These individuals would require the same kind of ravitaillement supplies and services which meant that the commission would be required to perform its previously-defined duties on an even large scale. Edward Eyre Hunt recalled that the

<sup>452</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 306. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 191, Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 304-305. Loc Cit, p. 305. Under the system an unemployed female industrial worker received the same sum as a man

misery was “as great or even greater” and the people were less energetic and resistant than in Belgium.<sup>453</sup>

In structure the ravitaillement of Northern France was less complex than that of Belgium. Under a system of occupied rule akin to an internment camp where practically all economic activity and movement was suspended the same measures of self-help and benevolence instituted in the Belgian communes were out of the question. Similarly, unlike the system in Belgium where the degree of dependency was determined on a day-to-day and person-to-person basis, the situation in France necessitated the on-going provisioning of the entire population. Within this structure the French government provided funds to the CRB via subsidy. Dissimilar to the Belgian population, the responsibility of the citizenry of France was to repay the government within his means after the war ended. From the commission’s perspective the question of finance also made relief efforts in France different and distinct. Unlike in Belgium, the direct subsidization of relief forced the CRB to be directly accountable to the French government. In regards to distribution, the situation in Northern France also required the commission to use a different system under a new set of guarantees negotiated with the Germans. The securing of these agreements marked the first time the CRB came into direct contact with the military administration of the Army Zone.<sup>454</sup>

Despite the differences in character the matter of feeding Northern France was arranged rather quickly in 1915 without much direct mediation by the commission. Commission delegate

<sup>453</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:393. Loc cit, p. 1:391. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 316.

<sup>454</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:312. Loc cit, p. 1:391. The Comité National included Flanders on a similar basis as in other Belgian provinces as well despite the differences between the military regime in the occupational district and the Étappen. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 135. In general the French ration was considerably larger than that in Flanders due to the fact that a much large quantity of native produce was available there. Loc cit, p. 157. Distribution in Flanders was similarly handled by the provincial committees subordinate to the Comité National. Loc cit, p. 157. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:392.

M. Guerin completed the final arrangements for ravitaillement on a trip from Lille to Paris while Hoover discussed the situation directly with the German General staff during his trip to Berlin in February. The speed in which the organization took shape was directly attributable to the progress made in general by the commission over its first six months of existence as a reputable, efficient, and benevolent relief organization in Belgium. Through its newly garnered international reputation the CRB used prior precedence to extend relief operations into Northern France without many of the obstacles that slowed the initial pace of relief organization in Belgium.<sup>455</sup>

Building off of the system of relief in Belgium the CRB made arrangements for the extension of ravitaillement in the anticipation of adding Northern France. Hoover in his initial preparations for the addition drew on the commission's accumulated credit to secure a supply of flour for France without diminishing Belgian rations. Having made arrangements for a baseline supply of additional relief, the chairman then used his diplomatic successes in Berlin and Brussels as a springboard for securing guarantees with the Germans in France. In establishing ravitaillement for the region, Hoover believed that the situation could be handled entirely by government subsidy. Unlike in Belgium, every individual in occupied France was considered destitute precisely because the French government provided direct assistance to the commission. This funding was contingent on the CRB meeting strict demands of neutrality and accountability. Commission representatives were told "above all, be careful not to let the Germans get any tin—not so much as the lid of a sardine box."<sup>456</sup>

<sup>455</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:547.

<sup>456</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:403. Loc cit, p. 1:469. It was also for this reason that the CRB made no general appeal for charitable funds on behalf of France in its press campaigns. Loc cit, p. 2:471. Taillandier, *The Soul of the "CRB,"* p. 185-186.



For accounting purposes the CRB accepted receipts from the communes and held them as final records of all transactions. Under the program the commission sold food at prices that were regularly reevaluated and fixed. These adjusted sale prices included a small marginal profit that served as a guard against excessive exchange, deterioration, or destruction losses. Clarifying the decision, Hoover reiterated that the CRB, Comité National, and Comité Français were “entirely humanitarian institutions working without profit,” but explained that while individual participants take no personal liability for imported provisions the institutions assume the assets and liabilities for all materials they have on hand for the French. For that reason protection was warranted.<sup>457</sup>

In practice the CRB charged the entire price of the imported foodstuffs to the district committees at a fixed level which was then in turn sold to the communes at a small advance sufficient to cover the cost of local distribution. At the final stage the communes resold the foodstuffs without profit to the general population in Northern France. While destitution was more widespread than in Belgium, the commission’s benevolent expenditures in Northern France were less in relation to the sums disbursed for general revictualment. Due to differences in the system and sources of funding (the direct subventions of the French government in particular) approximately \$558,000,000 went toward benevolence in Belgium while \$55,000,000 was used in Northern France.<sup>458</sup>

From an organizational perspective the largest difference between relief efforts in Belgium and Northern France was the designation that everyone was to receive a full ration whether they could afford it or not. Realistically the lack of native food supplies compelled the

<sup>457</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:469. Loc cit, p. 1:428.

<sup>458</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:471. Loc cit, p. 2:312-313. Loc cit, p. 2:313. Of the grand total of \$615,237,147.47 spent on benevolence, France received \$54,782,601.85 of that figure while \$558,386,857.67 went to Belgium. Also included in this grand total is an additional \$2,067,687.95 spent on clothing. Loc cit, p. 2:313.

commission to provide nearly the entire diet for people in the region. The Germans for their part provided a percentage of the flour consumed by the French from the domestic harvests they controlled as a condition of negotiations with the CRB governing the continuation of ravitaillement. Derived from combined supplies the average cost of rations per week was set at approximately three to four francs in mid-1915. Once in place the system provided a minimum program of relief for Northern France. CRB delegate T.B. Kittredge recalled that while the rations were “never really sufficient,” they were enough to carry the population through to the armistice without any actual starvation.<sup>459</sup>

In March 1915 the CRB extended relief into Northern France through the Comité d'Alimentation du Nord de la France (the Comité Français). After inception the Comité Français became responsible for the internal administration of relief in occupied sections of France under the guidance of the commission. By definition the French committee was headquartered in Brussels and included representatives of both the CRB and the Comité National. Under a shared power structure the district, regional, and communal committees were responsible for the distribution of relief in Northern France managed by CRB representatives in the field.<sup>460</sup>

In structure the Comité Français resembled the Comité National but in practice faced more severe German limitations than its Belgian counterpart. Emile Francqui suggested that in order to organize the work on similar lines to the Comité National it was necessary to secure guarantees from the general-government protecting all imported foods complete with permission to ship it to France. Once these preliminary agreements were in place the French were then promised assistance with transportation and distribution by the Belgian National committee. The

<sup>459</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 156. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 5:284. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 156. Once shipping totals declined the average price rose to 6-8 francs per week. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 5:284.

<sup>460</sup> Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. 186. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:466.

actual task of coordinating ravitaillement proved highly problematic after the Comité received initial authorization to provision the population however. In occupied France it was harder to organize local committees due to the largely missing male segment of the population. This removal of family breadwinners combined with the suspension of many French industries to produce a greater relative degree of destitution than was found in Belgium. By July, Hoover commented that in general the Comité Français was well organized and the communes were providing good and efficient services. The problem before the commission involved administration and the challenge of supporting a universally destitute population on £500,000 a month.<sup>461</sup>

Both organizations shared a similar commitment to decentralized policy making based on the normal political divisions existing in Belgium and France. Under both central committees were systems of provincial, district, regional, and at the lowest level communal organizations. Headed by the burgomasters (mayors) in Belgium and *maires* in Northern France the communal committees were staffed by both officials and volunteers. By contrast the provincial committees in Belgium were composed of representatives of all sections of the province and headed by two delegates from the Comité National while in Northern France the chain of communication with Brussels was maintained through a minimum of two representatives of the CRB who collaborated with each provincial and district committee.<sup>462</sup>

Once food reached the communes it was distributed in the French districts in much the same way as in Belgium, except that the communal administration directly controlled and managed the foodstuffs whereas in Belgium the service was done by local committees and not

<sup>461</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:412. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 139. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:417. Loc cit, p. 1:420.

<sup>462</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:467. Loc cit, p. 2:467-468. Loc cit, p. 2:468.

officially by communal administrations. According to the commission the fact that distribution was handled officially by the communes in France made for a more effective system of control than was possible in Belgium. Assisting this process was the CRB's ability to deal directly with military authorities. In Northern France the Comité Français did not have to negotiate through diplomatic patrons or German officials.<sup>463</sup>

For the purposes of provision and distribution the occupied territories of France were divided into six districts coinciding with the territory of the five German armies operating within the area. Each of the six districts were subdivided into regions containing a group of communes (also known as syndicates) with each region having its own committee. These district and regional committees handled the details of distribution under the limitations of German orders and worked in close cooperation with the CRB who assigned two American delegates to each district and set up a central office at the German general headquarters in Charleville. At the headquarters of each district (which included Lille, Valenciennes, St. Quentin, Vervins, Charleville, and Longwy) an American was stationed with a German officer. Operating over an area of 8,100 square miles with a civil population of 1,794,506 the system contained 2,133 communes served by 106 regional warehouses. With each German army existing as an independent government this was the best practical method for dividing relief operations in Northern France given the diversity of conditions in the various districts.<sup>464</sup>

<sup>463</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 156 and Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 5:284. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 207. American delegates in Northern France were generally met with few complaints as they journeyed across their districts managing the distribution of food. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:412.

<sup>464</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 151. The only exception was the division of the Sixth Army that between Lille and Valenciennes. Loc cit, p. 151 and Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:495. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 151. At Charleville the commission allowed a delegate of the Comité National to take the place of one of the two Americans if needed. At the executive level the central committee headquartered at Brussels handled all accounting and served as a central control mechanism with the CRB office. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:412. Loc cit, p. 1:495. Loc cit, p. 2:468 and Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. 186. In 1915, Lille contained 107 communes for its total

The management of each district varied from others based on necessity and the current situations found within its borders. At the center of the system the commission explained to the Allies was its obligation to see that foodstuffs were distributed equitably over the entire population while making sure that the German authorities did not interfere with its distribution. In the province of Hainaut for example the organization of relief was markedly different from other areas in that volunteers played a tremendous vital and prominent role in ravitaillement. Once in place the province shared responsibility for the Maubeuge area with the Mons committee. Consequently, the Mons group supplied the food while the Hainaut committee sheltered the financial responsibility for the supplies and arranged for later repayment from the people of Maubeuge. The success of this province in particular highlighted the structure of the system that coordinated volunteer activities through official action rather than spontaneous acts of local administration.<sup>465</sup>

Distribution of relief in Northern France officially began in the districts of Valenciennes on April 6, 1915 and in Lille on April 10. Over the next few weeks other regions received shipment of their first relief supplies with Guise and Ternier being last to receive initial delivery on May 6. When food arrived it was divided in each district between the various regions in proportion to the overall population. Generally each region made deliveries every two weeks with the communes being required to come to the regional depots to secure their rations. The rations themselves were usually fixed at the head office of each district either by the French committee directly or by an American delegate working in cooperation with the Comité Français.

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population of 622,596 people; Valenciennes contained 339 communes for its 591,155 population; St. Quentin contained 511 communes for its 450,424 population; Vervins contained 431 communes for its 222,646 population; Charleville contained 339 communes for its 150,476 population; and Longwy contained 409 communes for its 112,218 inhabitants (totaling 2,133). Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 154. Loc cit, p. 151.

<sup>465</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:49. The CRB also stipulated that as a humanitarian body it endeavored to treat the rich and poor in the same manner. Loc cit, p. 1:59. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 21. Loc cit, p. 136. Loc cit, p. 137. Loc cit, p. 21.

In its early days the Comité National working with the Comité Français set a definite ration program that for the most part maintained was throughout the war. Every family used a ration card in order to receive provisions which were received from the communal depots at stated intervals—usually every fifteen days.<sup>466</sup>

In provisioning Northern France the CRB and the Comité Français interacted with the German general government in a more direct manner than in Belgium. Commission and Comité members reported that on the whole the Germans faithfully adhered to the guarantees signed on April 13, 1915. Few cases of food seizures were ever reported. When an incident did occur the German authorities themselves showed “great energy” in punishing the offenders and preventing further violations. The agreements signed in April were supplemented by an order from the general-government on August 23 providing for the delivery of 100 grams of flour per day from German stocks. This ration was to be issued by officers assigned to work with the American delegates under the same protections as foods imported by the commission. On September 3, a supplementary order was issued providing 200 grams of potatoes to the civil population for six months under the same arrangements put in place for flour distribution. These two agreements were adjuncts to the larger negotiations between the CRB and the Germans that secured domestic harvests for 1915 and 1916.<sup>467</sup>

In Northern France the experience of CRB delegates was considerably different than those stationed in Belgium. Before ravitaillement was officially offered the commission proclaimed that it would not distribute any food unless American delegates were permitted to inspect conditions and maintain the system. As a part of the original accord extending relief into

<sup>466</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:411. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 155. The quantities available for this ration were changed from time to time depending on the situation. Loc cit, p. 156.

<sup>467</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 153. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:570.

the occupied territories the Supplementary Agreement No. 1 dealt with delegates specifically. Setting the stage for shared responsibility, the agreement specified that commission delegates were authorized to distribute goods in accordance with the agreement while the German military authorities promised to assist them in carrying out this duty. The agreement also stipulated that the Americans allowed to reside in the army districts were to be assigned a French and English-speaking *Begleits-offiziere* (accompanying officer). As a part of his detail the officer was required to accompany the representative on all of his journeys for their “personal safety” and was required to assist them in “every possible way.” In practice, John Lowrey Simpson observed that the role of the delegate was to serve as both a custodian of guarantees and as an agent of Brussels sent to report on the “exact and special needs” of the district. The German officer by contrast combined with his functions as a “detective extraordinary” a considerable role in facilitating the move of foodstuffs and the elimination of obstacles.<sup>468</sup>

The commission issued its own set of expectations for American delegates in Northern France. Primary among them was the obligation to “carry on his duties in such a manner as may be expected from an honorable citizen of a neutral state.” Considering the pressure of relieving millions under the watchful eye of German officers the task of maintaining strict neutrality proved extremely difficult. Hardest of all was resisting the temptation to verbally spar with or criticize the accompanying officers. Delegates understood that any resentment they harbored or bitter remarks they uttered would only make their position increasingly unpleasant and the work correspondingly less more difficult.<sup>469</sup>

<sup>468</sup> Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 5:277. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1: 415. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 5: 277. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:416. Loc cit, p. 1:494.

<sup>469</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 151. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 5:278.

As a permanent fixture of the relief structure in Northern France the relationship between delegates and German officers often complicated the process of ravitaillement. Compounding these difficulties were feelings that representatives were shackled to their officers without any personal liberties. Speaking on the subject of accompaniment, commission delegate T.B. Kittredge recalled that, “We lived with them, fed with them, worked with them, drank with them, quarreled with them, and through them came to revile Prussianism (and) all its work in a way some of never had dreamed possible.” Kittredge added that in order to perform their duties the delegate was forced to adjust his relations in such a way to make sure that inspections were made and that food was getting to the French only. This close relationship put Americans in the “sorrowful” position of being considered pro-Germany by a considerable part of the French population that did not know the circumstances of their forced association with officers. Despite the difficulties this relationship was not without its advantages in establishing better control over distribution and improving direct relations with the general government however.<sup>470</sup>

Due to these complexities many American representatives reported that the experience in Northern France took a larger toll on them than in Belgium. Higher turn-over rates in France confirmed this belief. In general there were few delegates who could remain at their post for more than six months at a time. As part of their duties the representatives traveled to Brussels every weekend to attend a conference on Saturday morning. These weekly meetings served a dual purpose of allowing directors to keep in personal touch with developments in France while allowing the delegates some breathing space from their German officers. T.B. Kittredge described the weekends in Brussels as a “genuine nervous relaxation” where representatives

<sup>470</sup> Kittredge explained that delegates could go nowhere, attend no conference, or hardly even take a walk without having an officer at their elbow. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 5:278. Loc cit, p. 5:277. Loc cit, p. 5:278. Loc cit, p. 5:284.



could associate with whom they liked without being spied upon and express their opinions freely.<sup>471</sup>

Sometimes the strains of working in Northern France were too much for Americans to handle. T.B. Kittredge reported that numerous delegates suffered from nervous breakdowns as a result of the “continuous strain, and the pressure of pent-up desire for expression of one’s opinion of the Huns.” On occasion the strains would grow too great and a stressed official would compromise his position by telling an officer exactly what he thought about them personally, the war, or Germany. Reports of such events were quite rare though.<sup>472</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 323. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 5:284.

<sup>472</sup> Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 5:278.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN: “A Major Crisis Once A Month, A Minor Crisis Once A Week”

### Ravitaillement in the Belgian Communes

Providing relief for millions of people in Belgium and Northern France required careful planning, preparation, and execution. With agreements in place the CRB simultaneously kept its attention on securing diplomatic authorizations while placing increasing focus on the actual provisioning of the civil population. As the “second phase” of relief, the action step of putting supplies in the hands of the beleaguered required an organizational structure as complex as any the commission worked with during the war combining international politics with the logistics of cooking thousands of hot meals on a daily basis. Hoover commented in early January 1915 that the problem of ravitaillement fell into two phases: the first providing bread for all those who were able to pay, and the second provisioning the 1.4 million destitute who were fed by public canteens. At the time the cost of this program was approximately \$2,500,000 a month and growing steadily.<sup>473</sup>

One of the most daunting features of ravitaillement was the size of its operations. From the perspective of actual recipients of relief and the amount of individuals and organizations participating in program the complexities of managing such an operation were numerous. At the executive level the CRB managed over 2,000 volunteer support committees scattered throughout the world. Working in cooperation with the Comité National and the Comité Français the commission dealt with another 5,000 separate committees handling food supplies and an almost equal number engaged directly in distribution. Covering an area of 19,455 square miles with a population of 9,084,500 people the CRB worked directly with 240 regional warehouses and 4,731 communes inside of the 17 provincial relief districts.<sup>474</sup>

<sup>473</sup> *New York Times*, Jan 7, 1915, p. 4.

<sup>474</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:466. Loc cit, p. 2:468.

To effectively manage the extensive system of tasks and processes the CRB employed a decentralized structure that relied heavily on the pre-existing communal structures. Observing the progress of work *The Economist* in September 1915 commented that the only rational manner that the commission could handle the revictualing of seven million people was through decentralization. Within this framework the local committees were empowered to perform the three essential functions of relief in Belgium: provisioning the population, carrying out financing, and providing for the destitute. A critical component of the commission's focus on localized management was the relationships forged between benevolent activity and the German general-government. In Belgium the available supplies of food and the morale of the civil population were proportionally related, giving added importance to the ability of the communal representatives and commission delegates to prevent requisitions. Belgian Minister M. Hymans believed that his nation was splendidly resisted the invader and avoided demoralization, but added that if CRB supplies were cut off the people of Belgium would "feel that their cause was lost and that they had been abandoned by their own government and its allies."<sup>475</sup>

While Belgians realized the nobility of the cause, the commission was not without its critics. Journalist Arthur Mason explained in a syndicated article that the CRB faced two kinds of common criticism. The first involved the belief that relieving Belgium ostensibly meant relieving Germany. The second questioned whether relief supplies were actually reaching Belgians. Doubts regarding the commission's ability to get supplies to the people hung over the entire operation throughout the war. Whitlock commented that the "whole history" of occupation was one of contests between German stolidity and brute force against the nimble wit of representatives in Brussels. At times it seemed to those working inside the commission that they would be unable to complete their task. Whitlock found the challenge of feeding Belgium

<sup>475</sup> *The Economist*, September 4, 1915. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 252.

“impossible” and “almost beyond human power.” From his perspective the work “seemed to be handing by very slender threads with almost insuperable difficulties surrounding it.”<sup>476</sup>

Commission members in general maintained a sense of cautious optimism regarding their work. Whitlock recalled that attempting to perform such deeds were “a piece of temerity that no one but a set of God’s own fools would ever have undertaken...” The work of the CRB was initially as misunderstood within Belgium as it was across belligerent and neutral nations. Captain J.F. Lucey reported that Belgians in the beginning did not know who they were or what they wanted and believed that the commission was trying to sell them something. He added that many of them had never heard of the United States and were unaware that a group of people would send free shiploads of food to them. Lucey believed that by February 1915 the Belgians understood what the mission of the CRB was. Questions regarding the reason for the appearance of a foreign contingent in Belgium were common nevertheless. Throughout the war most of the misconceptions about the commission’s work were due to the complexity of its activities.<sup>477</sup>

Indeed the complex nature of operations subjected relief operations to potential breakdowns and perhaps even failure. Dr. Vernon Kellogg recalled that the commission expected “a major crisis once a month, a minor crisis once a week.” Even though the Germans generally respected their guarantees there were always a plethora of ancillary difficulties preventing the commission from completing its task hassle-free. According to Whitlock the German general-government believed it was doing the CRB a favor in allowing relief operations

<sup>476</sup> *Morning Post*, April 22, 1916. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 2:35-36. Loc cit, p. 1:545. The work was indeed challenging. Whitlock reported that the Legation received quantities of letters from people who “had evidently gone mad.” Loc cit, p. 2:55.

<sup>477</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:537. *New York Times*, Feb 28, 1915. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 5.

to continue that absolved them from any feelings of gratitude towards the recipient by adhering to its promises.<sup>478</sup>

Despite the difficulties presented the representatives of the CRB were expected to meet their objectives. Dean Howard McClenahan of Princeton told the *New York Times* in early February that after returning from Belgium that the only flour in the country was provided by the commission. By that point a reported 170,000 out of 600,000 residents of Brussels were fed on the bread line with Belgians everywhere expressing “undying gratitude for what America is doing for them.” McClenahan concluded that from his perspective “the speed, thoroughness, and efficiency with which the commission is doing its welcome work is from every point of view admirable.” J.F. Lucey reported on February 28 that he could “state with absolute assurance” that every Belgian with the exception of those within the fighting zones were receiving “their just and proper share of the American bounty” regardless of income. Representative T.B. Kittredge added that the commission’s extraordinary efficiency, altruism, and humanitarianism were “an expression of Americanism at its best.”<sup>479</sup>

Within the organization of relief the provisioning department and the provincial committees themselves were due a large share of the credit for the commission’s successes in Belgium and Northern France. In theory the CRB decided that the actual work of handing shipments within the provinces was to be left to the provincial committee and the communes who were instructed to provide delegates with receipts for all supplies received. Working collaboratively the provincial committee decided to transform their provisioning department into

<sup>478</sup> Kellogg, *Herbert Hoover As His Friends See Him*, p. 9. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:365. *The Times* on February 13, 1915 confirmed that the Germans were keeping their promises. *The Times*, Feb 13, 1915.

<sup>479</sup> Kellogg, *Herbert Hoover As His Friends See Him*, p. 9. Kellogg personally attributed the ability of the commission to overcome tremendous obstacles to Hoover’s “genius and superhuman labor.” *New York Times*, Feb 2, 1915, p. 3. *New York Times*, Feb 28, 1915. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 4:164.

a cooperative society based out of Antwerp. Once in place the executive committee of the cooperative acted as head of the provisioning department for the provisional committee.<sup>480</sup>

As an operational division of the CRB the provisioning department performed several of the most vital ravitaillement tasks. Serving as the purchasing, transportation, and distribution agency the department provided relief supplies through the 4,731 communal stores set up by the commission. During the first year of operation (October 22, 1914 to October 31, 1915) the CRB delivered a total of 988,852 tons of foodstuffs through the provisioning department. At a total value of £11,401,637, the delivery of these supplies required 186 full cargoes (averaging 4,647 tons) and another 308 partial cargoes (averaging 209) to complete the job. In total the provisioning department transported over five million tons of supplies between 1914 and 1919.<sup>481</sup>

Statistics regarding shipment totals only partially explain the service rendered to Belgium and Northern France by the commission through the provisioning department, provincial committees, Comité National/Français, and communes. Over this same twelve-month period (October 1914 through October 1915) the CRB was able to deliver its food at an average price lower than those found in London. Several products in particular including ice, beans, peas, bacon, and lard in particular were actually cheaper in Brussels. To maintain cost-efficiency the normal program of the CRB provided for the delivery of over 100,000 tons of food each month doled out in the form of “scientifically calculated” daily rations containing the proper amounts of protein, albumin, and carbohydrates with the minimum total calories that would sustain life and

<sup>480</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 95. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 259. Loc cit, p. 261. Edward Eyre Hunt believed that this reorganization was a critical step for the commission, ending the “days of disunion and divided efforts.”

<sup>481</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:469. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 235. Including transportation and insurance costs (totaling £2,215,473) the final cost of these foodstuffs to the CRB was £13,617,110. This total excludes the native products of Belgium and Northern France. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:474.

health. In order to make sure the proper amounts of food were available and that current stocks did not decay or go to waste the commission instituted a rigid inventory control system for all warehouses done at the end of every month.<sup>482</sup>

Even with the system of rations and inventory in place the complexities of the program at times went beyond the abilities of CRB representatives. From a planning perspective the program required a three month implementation period before any theoretical changes could begin. In practice the commission struggled to keep up with supply issues within the system, importing bread grains in great excess of the amounts produced locally but never being able to consistently maintain its theoretical program. For the most part this failure was due to external factors rather than want of effort however. Major problems notwithstanding, the CRB was able to meet requirements close enough to the normal program to save the populations of occupied Belgium and Northern France from famine or serious deterioration from undernourishment.<sup>483</sup>

Operating beyond the commission's theoretical program of imports and the work of the provisioning department were its representatives. Serving as the people who actually made ravitaillement possible the CRB placed two American delegates inside each of the eleven Belgian and six French provinces. In fulfilling their duties these representatives were asked to perform "varied, unconventional, and interesting" tasks. Their contributions helped the CRB lower its costs across the board. Speaking on the value of these individuals the CRB regaled that

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<sup>482</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 235. During this time the average cost of white bread in Brussels was 44 centimes per kilo while in London the price was 45 centimes and 47.5 centimes in Rotterdam. Rice was 61 centimes in Brussels and 94 centimes in London. For beans and peas the price was 78 centimes in Brussels and 82 centimes in London. For bacon the maximum price averaged 2 francs/kilos in Brussels while the price selling for 2.75 in London. For lard the price in Brussels averaged 1.70 while staying at 1.90 in London. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 1:6. This ration system was carefully checked and enforced by the communes with allowance in the program being made for the food products available and/or obtainable through local sources. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:125.

<sup>483</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:125-126. Loc cit, p. 1:510. Factors injuring efforts to provide the theoretical program included lack of funding, shortage of ships, arbitrary restrictions created by the British Foreign Office, u-boat/unrestricted submarine warfare, and world food shortages.

the distinguished services provided by volunteers in all spheres of activity were in great measure directly responsible for the success of its operations, allowing the commission to keep overhead and administrative costs below one-half of one percent.<sup>484</sup>

At the commune level the “harmonious and cordial” collaboration between the American delegate and the Belgian committee was maintained throughout the war. The experience of delegates confirmed the value of volunteer work and its place within the commission’s work. Rhodes Scholar T.H. Jones explained in May 1915 that the “real value of the work” in Belgium was being done by Americans themselves. At the time the situation was particularly critical as other sources of supplies were cut off from access while the Dutch government refused to export foodstuffs to make bridge the gap. All the while the Germans denied responsibility for provisioning the civil population. Considering the circumstances the fact that “every bit of bread eaten by a Belgian now comes into this country via Rotterdam through the agency of the commission” was clear evidence of the value of American delegates according to Jones.<sup>485</sup>

Interpersonal and inter-group relationships formed the critical interlocking components of the commission’s system of ravitaillement. At the administrative level the cooperative association between the CRB and the Comité National provided the vital link between the coordination of relief supplies and the final distribution of relief to the civil population. Both organizations worked with the commission’s provisioning department and cultivated direct relationships with the communes through American delegates. Finalized in December 1914, the association provided the flexibility needed to maintain relief efforts throughout the war.<sup>486</sup>

<sup>484</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:477. Loc cit, p. 2:236. Loc cit, p. 2:236-237.

<sup>485</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 98. *Nottingham Guardian*, May 2, 1915. Jones was a student at Exeter College serving in Belgium.

<sup>486</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 99.



Working in concert with each other the CRB handled the strategic work of ravitaillement while the Comité National planned and executed its tactics. In a joint planning session the two organizations agreed that the general relationship between the commission and the Comité was one of joint cooperation and collaboration in general policy, general direction, and control of the distribution of commodities and benevolence. Outside observers began seeing the results of unified efforts within a few weeks joint action. In February 1915 the Rockefeller Foundation reported that the “magnitude and complexity” of relief required a “high order of intelligence and administrative ability” provided by the two organizations. “We are satisfied as to the integrity, ability, and high purpose of the men who are conducting these organizations and their work,” the report concluded.<sup>487</sup>

Representatives and delegates also agreed that the collaboration between the CRB and the Comité National improved the effectiveness and efficiency of relief efforts in Belgium. Beyond its performance the association served as an important connection between domestic (Comité National) and international (CRB) groups which showed the potential for conflict detrimental to the civil population. The relationship also brought together divergent groups within Belgium for a common goal as well. Edward Eyre Hunt commented that the collaboration brought together groups in Antwerp that were the “bitterest rivals” beforehand. While participants were unable to put aside their animosities overnight, Hunt found that there was for maybe the first time a “definite feeling of the pettiness of politics in the face of national calamity.” This did not mean that participants and the two organizations saw eye-to-eye on all issues however. Nationalistic sentiments within Belgium believing that ravitaillement was a domestic program outside of the purview of international and/or neutral interests persisted throughout the war era. Disagreements

<sup>487</sup> The London Times, *History of the War*, p. 444. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:112. *New York Times*, Feb 28, 1915.

over the functions of the CRB were also an ongoing part of the relationship. While both agreed that the work of the commission was “indispensable” to the success of relief operations and that American delegates should perform supervisory duties to make sure that food and benevolence were efficiently handled and fairly distributed it was repeatedly argued that the actual work of distribution was essentially a domestic problem that could be best handled by Belgians who were better equipped to handle the task.<sup>488</sup>

Considering issues of internal politics, national demands, and logistics within the pre-existing communal structure the two organizations maintained a cooperative relationship as nominally distinct entities. The essential difference between the commission and the committee lay in that the CRB was composed of neutrals while the Comité was staffed by Belgians. In conducting the business of relief the commission was responsible for the observance of agreements to the various governments, making purchases, organizing transportation, and maintaining control of supplies until they reached the Comité and the communes that served as the “retail distributors.” As a part of this responsibility the CRB assumed an obligation to the public by promising that the supplies sent into Belgium would not be requisitioned by the Germans and that these foodstuffs would be delivered into the country with no undue delays to the communes under the direction of the Comité National. The commission also advanced funds to the communal governments by taking their obligations and pledging them abroad for further resources. In doing so the communes were able to procure money to pay communal officers, maintain schools, and keep up municipal works. These vital funds enabled Belgians to carry on the duties of local government that saved the country from the dangers of anarchy.<sup>489</sup>

<sup>488</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 253. Loc cit, p. 254. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 96.

<sup>489</sup> The London Times, *History of the War*, p. 444. *New York Times*, Feb 28, 1915. The commission also promised to the public that the money derived from the sale of provisions within the communes would be converted into

The commission made it clear that its sole objective was “to help the Belgians.” In a meeting between the CRB and the Comité National in July 1915 the commission explained that once the Belgians were in a position to “obtain free play” with their abilities and resources the assistance of any other nationality would no longer be needed. At the moment the CRB believed that Belgium was nearing the point of self-sufficiency and began planning its withdrawal. This departure would never take place however—the need for its guidance was too great. In order to assure that foodstuffs were imported in sufficient quantities and equally distributed the CRB placed a staff of volunteers inside of the Belgian communes. For its part the Comité National instituted a “Controlling Service” in every province to avoid irregularities in the distribution process. The result of this joint-operation was the centralization of efforts in Brussels and the control of relief throughout the communes under Hoover and the Executive Committee of the Comité National.<sup>490</sup>

As a part of this collaboration the CRB imported foodstuffs that remained the property of the commission until they were delivered to the communal committees. In order to do so the commission and the Comité agreed in June 1915 that they needed to determine domestic crop supplies so that districts requiring immediate imports could be assisted first. The two organizations also agreed that the CRB should do its best to insure that domestic harvests should be reserved exclusively for the civil population in each district. A month later the German general government responded to the collaborative effort by promising that the provision and “up-keep” of the civil population would continue to be kept separate from that of the German army and that Belgians would “alone enjoy the advantage of relief distributed by the Comité

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bread, soup, clothing, and other items for the destitute while keeping exact open records for all operations and expenditures. *New York Times*, May 17, 1915, p. 5.

<sup>490</sup> CRB and CN meeting in Brussels, July 20, 1915. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:67. Loc cit, p. 1:85.

National,” and that the Comité National and the CRB would continue to enjoy the liberty of action necessary to fulfill its mission. General von der Lancken also promised in the July 29 letter that under the agreement between the commission and the belligerent governments in violation of The Hague conventions the German general government would allow the Comité National to purchase cereals in occupied territory and that the distribution of these cereals would be under the control of the Comité under the same stipulations governing imported goods.<sup>491</sup>

Combined over a hundred principal committees and nearly 4,000 regional subcommittees dealt with the CRB and the Comité National. Despite their differences the commission and the Comité worked well together and as a unit functioned “admirably efficient” according to Whitlock. In late-July 1915, William C. Edgar commented that it had probably never occurred before that representatives of a neutral nation voluntarily came forward to interject between conflicting armies for the preservation of a civil population. He added that without a doubt no group had ever worked with a provisional organization composed of leading citizens in a joint operation for a common objective. For this reason, Edgar believed the cooperative arrangement was an “unexampled” illustration of what could be accomplished by “American business, joining with that of Belgium, when it applies itself to humanitarian work with the same energy and intelligence that it ordinarily exerts in industrial and commercial channels.” Edgar offered his highest praise for the performance of the commission and the Comité, concluding that “I have never before seen one that can compare in efficiency, thoroughness, and wisdom with the system now being employed in Belgium through the combined efforts of the commission and the Comité National.”<sup>492</sup>

<sup>491</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:97. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:166. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 165.

<sup>492</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:236. Within the CRB itself approximately 75,000 people were engaged in the direct mobilization of public support. Nevins, *The Letters and*

At the final stage of ravitaillement were the communes and the communal structure. The commission decided to use these pre-existing structures of local government in Belgium as the centers of distribution for relief instead of attempting to forge an entirely new system in the sinews of war. Initially the CRB worked with the communes in Brussels and the surrounding jurisdictions and then extended the structure to the entire nation. For the purposes of relief the country was divided into ten areas corresponding to the provinces with an extra committee being formed for the city of Brussels apart from the province of Brabant where the city is located. Under each provincial committee were regional subcommittees and the communal committees at the local level.<sup>493</sup>

Even under the pressures of occupation the communes continued to perform the duties of local government. Each commune elected a common council that governed the community much like American city councils. Out of the common council a burgomaster (or mayor) was chosen along with a number of *échevins* who served as heads of departments that in essence created a commission form of government. Across Belgium the communes were grouped into 223 cantons that were a part of the 41 arrondissements inside the nine provinces. Elected bodies governed each corresponding level of government from the cantons to the arrondissements and the provinces up to the national parliament. Whitlock credited the communal system's struggle for freedom as the critical factor in the Belgium's "genius for self government" and the factor which allowed the nation to survive stubbornly under the successive domination of Spain, Austria, Holland, and Germany. He believed that without such a strong, fundamental

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*Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:90. *Field*, July 31, 1915, *Bristol Observer*, Aug 7, 1915, and *North London Guardian*, Jul 31, 1915.

<sup>493</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:34.

organization uniting people in a common ideal and satisfying the needs of the population the country would not have survived German occupation.<sup>494</sup>

With a long history of self-sustaining local government the communes appeared as the natural entity to handle the final distribution of relief goods imported by the commission. In setting up the system of distribution in Belgium the CRB had to overcome obstacles due to high levels of independence and self-protection found within the communes that only intensified once German forces pushed across the nation. At heart many Belgians felt that the care of their people and the distribution of food and benevolent funds were essentially a domestic problem and that local leaders were sufficiently capable, self-sacrificing, and patriotic enough to administer the relief supplies unaided. They also believed that money used for the purchase of food was donated by the Belgian government to the Comité National directly or by the sympathetic world to the Belgian nation and found it proper that funding should be disbursed by the Comité accordingly. Within a structure dominated by local control of relief, Belgians believed that the CRB was to function as an executive agent of the Comité National outside of Belgium and as a useful cooperating body of neutrals inside the country with the ability to negotiate with belligerents and to offer protections to supplies distributed by the Comité.<sup>495</sup>

While the communal system provided a pre-existing structure for local distribution the virtual power struggle over the ownership of relief responsibility complicated the process of organization. One of the greatest difficulties in establishing efficient methods of controlling relief belonged to the character of the Belgian people and the nature of their system of local government. Before the outbreak of war the communes enjoyed high levels of independence from the national government and a great amount of power in matters of civic administration.

<sup>494</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:344. According to Whitlock the municipal system of Britain and America was derived from Belgium. Loc cit, p. 1:344-335. Loc cit, p. 1:345.

<sup>495</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 104.

Composed of communal officials the local committees were naturally inclined to object to any attempt by external organizations to dictate the terms under which they should distribute food. They consistently regarded the instructions they received as unjust and unnecessary intrusions in matters that were communal concerns only.<sup>496</sup>

Gaining a quick understanding of the situation the principles upon which relief were based granted local and provisional committees broad based powers of independent action to adapt the system of food distribution to the specific needs of the commune. Initially the role of the provincial committees were rather small, concerning itself chiefly with financial matters and the reception of food before exercising greater autonomy and influence. As the structure of relief began taking shape a system of nearly 5,000 communes worked in cooperation with the Comité National to assure the distribution of ravitaillement. Edward Eyre Hunt observed that the communal authorities were for the most part left in possession of their normal powers, subject to military oversight. At the local level the court system was not greatly disturbed, the police kept order, and civil servants manned fire departments, maintained prisons, and managed street and light rails along with other municipal services. The burgomasters and aldermen continued to perform some of the functions of local self-government outside of the German sphere of influence.<sup>497</sup>

Local governments under the communal system of distribution held diminished civic powers but possessed tremendous responsibility in the provisioning of ravitaillement. All expenses of relief operations were bore by the provincial committees, including charges for lighters beyond original destination points, demurrage fee, costs of unloading and storing

<sup>496</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 238.

<sup>497</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 82-83 and Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:482. Loc cit, p. 1:482. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 83. In April 1917, Hoover cited a total number of 2,770 communes in the occupied portion of Belgium serving an average population of approximately 650 families each. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:318. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 173. Loc cit, p. 173-174.

supplies, and expenses of distribution to the communes. To prevent the stoppage of relief the Comité National agreed that if a commune could not pay its one-third responsibility for the costs of supplies distributed at its canteens the Comité would provide sufficient funds to meet its obligations. This did not free the commune from financial responsibility for supplies it distributed however. In accordance with agreements made by the commission with the French and Belgian governments the communes were required to assume an obligation to repay the value of all supplies received within six months of the end of conflict. Hoover credited these pre-war institutions with providing an “extraordinary network of charitable effort covering the entire country,” caring for approximately 300,000 people through over 4,000 institutions.<sup>498</sup>

In deciding to use the communal structure as the basis for relief distribution the commission carefully positioned itself within the preexisting system of Belgian government in an attempt to best maximize the efforts of both groups. According to commission delegate T.B. Kittredge, Hoover and the cadre of American volunteers never desired to interfere in domestic problems or to criticize Belgian methods. The CRB simply desired to control the distribution of supplies in a manner that would allow it to give assurance to the Allies that guarantees were being maintained and continue its program of imports. The Germans themselves took the position that the Belgians should distribute relief supplies under the control of military authorities and attempted to limit the freedoms of American delegates as much as possible within the communes. General von Bissing told Hoover in February 1915 after his first visit to Berlin that the Americans were “altogether too active in Belgium.” In his view it would be sufficient for the CRB to attach delegates to the various communal and regional warehouses and not travel around the country performing inspection duties. The Germans also pressed the communes as

<sup>498</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 181. Loc cit, p. 155. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:317.



well. In June 1915 the general-government decreed that the committees were not allowed to give any instructions or make any rules or regulations for the communes.<sup>499</sup>

For the first several months of operation the commission left local committees alone to do their work except for sporadic visits from an American delegate or members of the provincial committee to make sure all was right. In March 1915 the CRB became more of a presence inside the communes by making a complete tour of all warehouses. After that point the commission worked with the Comité National to improve the efficiency of distribution. By mid-December, the CRB directly controlled a system of 125 district warehouses that received foodstuffs shipped under the commission's own seal and flag for the supply of communal committees. Hoover reported that as a check on this system the commission maintained a series of inspections and required monthly reports from the communal warehouses detailing the exact total of foodstuffs used during the month. This system expanded to eventually contain 134 regional warehouses serving 2,598 communes and nearly 5,000 communal stores employing over 35,000 Belgians.<sup>500</sup>

The first relief measures taken by volunteer committees and the communes were designed to relief distress to those without resources and then expanded to include large segments of the population. In late-1914 the work of the commission touched 165 communes, requiring the creation of a meticulous system of distribution and control to avoid waste or misuse. As one of the first cities to participate in the program, Antwerp quickly divorced itself from the municipal government (much to the displeasure of local officials) in order to allow businessmen with experience in managing such a complex structure to handle relief. By early-

<sup>499</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 105. Loc cit, p. 189. Hoover's visit to Berlin in February 1915 upset members of the general government in Belgium at the time because they felt that the chairman had ostensibly gone over their heads in pressing the demands of the commission directly with the Imperial Government. Loc cit, p. 193.

<sup>500</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 263. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:112. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 242. Loc cit, p. 242-243. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:468 and Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 1:6.

1915 the actual processes of distribution centered in Rotterdam were firmly established on business lines. Observers noted that Belgians received food from two sources—the local baker and the communal office. In order to provide jobs the CRB and the Comité National ground wheat at mills in Brussels, Liège, and Louvain while soup was made in large quantities at central depots and sent by wagons to the communes where it was served cold.<sup>501</sup>

In general the machinery of food distribution was the same in all of the eleven districts. Foodstuffs for most of the provinces came directly from Rotterdam via the canals. Each province was subdivided into regions according to area and population and provided with a regional depot under the supervision of the provincial committee. Once unloaded from the canals the food was either sent directly to the regional warehouses for storage until final distribution by the communes or was placed in large general warehouses located near the points where the cargoes were discharged. The first thing observer Arno Dosch noticed about the warehouses in April 1915 was that no distinctions were being made between foods supplied by the United States and Belgium. The communes then made out requisitions for quantities of food they needed and sent the information to the provincial committee where the department of alimentation checked over the request and filled it either completely or to the best of its ability. The regional warehouse usually did not issue food to a commune without a delivery order verified by the provincial committee.<sup>502</sup>

Once foodstuffs were transferred from the provincial committee to the communes the system became highly decentralized. Local representatives were allowed to deliver food to

<sup>501</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 10. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 251. *Glasgow Herald*, Jan 22, 1915.

<sup>502</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 181. There were three main arteries that brought food supplies Holland to Belgium. The first went from Terneuzen and Sas van Ghent to Ghent, the second from Roosendaal to Antwerp and Brussels or Louvain, and the third from Rotterdam via Dordrecht and Weert into Limbourg. Loc cit, p. 68 and 69. *World's World*, April 1915, 436. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 181.

consumers without much check and control from higher authorities, meaning that at times they paid little heed to regulations regarding distribution. Under the system the communes received supplies from the CRB every two weeks, allowing everyone to get something. Arno Dosch reported that by April 1915 most Belgians knew how Americans felt as a people towards them and were conscious of the generosity offered by the United States. More than anything else, Dosch believed that they were even more appreciative of the way in which relief was handled.<sup>503</sup>

At the base of the relief operations was the CRB's commitment to see that every Belgian over two-years-old received a ration of 250 grams a day of bread. The creation of a bread ration program proved most challenging despite the perceived simplicity of the goal however. Early attempts by the commission to relieve the population through cornmeal and oatmeal yielded rations with little nutritive value. Compounding the difficulties was the fact that few people Belgians understood how to cook American food staples, using high quality corn as chicken feed for example. To address the situation the commission hastily organized committees to educate communal administrators and its residents about the proper use of imports. Under the program teachers of domestic science from the city of Antwerp traveled to the villages giving lectures on how to properly cook cornmeal. The native prejudice against using corn for human consumption persisted in Belgium, requiring the commission to rechristen cornmeal and hominy as cerealine, idealine, and other more appetizing names. The commission faced other peculiar challenges in providing rations that at times conflicted with the dietary culture of Belgium. One of the strangest requests the commission received was for dog-bread. As a proletarian animal of vital

<sup>503</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 177. Eventually this laissez faire policy developed problems of illicit traffic that had to be dealt with. Taillandier, *The Soul of the "CRB,"* p. 199. *World's World*, April 1915, p. 436.

use to peasants the CRB worked out a program to supply dogs with a cheap supply of bread as well.<sup>504</sup>

The limited supply of white flour threatened all ration programs created by the commission. In an attempt to deal with the issue the commission imported wheat and mill it locally at a 90/10 cornmeal mixture to reduce the price by about ten francs per hundred kilograms. To meet this demand the CRB contracted with ten provincial steam mills; one for maize belonging to the Comité National, one for wheat for the provincial committees of Limbourg, one serving the needs of Waesland, and seven for the provincial committee of Antwerp. In the realm of sales and distribution the CRB also established a partial flour monopoly over baking. Under the system local bakers were kept in competition while the commission paired off the profits of bread making to keep the prices as low as possible for consumers.<sup>505</sup>

By March 1915 the commission had worked out a definite program of imports that became the base of the ration offered to Belgians. Under its guidelines the CRB was asked to import a minimum of 60,000 tons a month of wheat and flour along with 1,000 tons of lard and bacon. The plan also desired increased imports for rice and maize while the Comité National offered to make up for any deficiencies in potatoes until the end of July. In addition, the commission also planned to import significant quantities of rice, salt, dried fish, and meats as well. The demands of this program were not maintained for long however. Hoover issued a memorandum on June 21 stating that in the future the CRB would confine its imports to wheat or flour, rice, peas and beans, lard, bacon, and maize.<sup>506</sup>

<sup>504</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 280. Loc cit, p. 282. Loc cit, p. 283.

<sup>505</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 285. Loc cit, p. 291. Loc cit, p. 362. Loc cit, p. 291.

<sup>506</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:122. Loc cit, p. 1:124.

Other factors beyond the availability of supplies directly impacted the theoretical program of importations issued by the commission. Of primary importance was the minimum ration requirement designated by the CRB. Calculated by the number of people being fed, calorie requirements per person per day and the calorie production of the food available locally or by importation stayed relatively consistent. The caloric value of the commission's program in particular varied from year to year and was the subject of numerous negotiation sessions between the commission and belligerent governments. In addition the protection of local harvests also had an important influence on the CRB's ability to determine its program of importation that by its nature was required to cover the deficit between the amount of local food available and the minimum ration needed to sustain the population "without immediate and serious physical deteriorations."<sup>507</sup>

Once the program of importations and rations were set the Comité National and the communes began distributing foodstuffs to the population. In the larger towns most of the food distributed gratuitously was given to the destitute in the form of daily meals served at canteens. At the same time there were rations available for sale at communal depots for those who could afford it. The price of these for-sale foods were arranged so that a small percentage was charged over the actual cost in order to generate a profit that could be added to the benevolent funds given to the destitute. Under this system the foodstuffs were distributed in a variety of ways in practically every province by early 1915. The use of household ration cards was not universally adopted by the Comité National and the communes until relief distribution was well underway. Until that time each commune devised individual methods for distributing food to consumers and checking its methods to prevent duplication and other abuses. It soon became apparent however that in order to function properly the system needed a uniform method of controlling local

<sup>507</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:509.

distribution. For the destitute the commission issued ration cards (*carte de ménage*) usable at public feedings for adults, canteens for infant children, and schools for youths. By October 1916 approximately 6,000,000 people were issued a *carte de ménage* with an additional 2,800,000 receiving assistance through public kitchens.<sup>508</sup>

Underlying the adoption of ration cards was the commission's desire to insure honest bread at an honest weight in an honest distribution among the population. After some experimentation the *carte de ménage* (household ration card) was issued for bread and sundry supplies distributed at the communal kitchen. On these cards the family's name and the time of weekly and bi-weekly distribution was listed. Offering universal assistance was another important priority for the commission. According to Arno Dosch, no one applying for a relief card was pauperized or made to feel ashamed. William C. Edgar was impressed by the system that had taken shape by August 1915, commenting that he could hardly believe that the CRB and the Comité was able to issue an index card to 500,000 people in Brussels with their personal information on it and the ration they were supposed to receive.<sup>509</sup>

A critical component of the ration card system initiated by the CRB was its ability to accurately determine the need of applicants. Under the system the commission required that when an applicant went to the Communal Charity Committee to ask for assistance they must possess documentation bearing civic status, means of subsistence, certificates of pension, certificates of assistance from the Bureau de Bienfaisance, a list of property holdings, marriage certificates, and the names and ages of spouse and children. These documents were checked against records held by the communal committee consisting of employers list of workers,

<sup>508</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 84. Loc cit, p. 4. Loc cit, p. 180. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:166. The kitchens offered a meal every day at noon for forty centimes (eighty cents). Withington, *In Occupied Belgium*, p. 34-35.

<sup>509</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 287. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 85. *World's World*, April 1915, p. 435. *North London Guardian*, August 7, 1915.

benevolent society rosters, pension lists, and other important data including police records.

When the committee desired more information on an applicant it sent a member to investigate the situation further.<sup>510</sup>

Once an individual was enrolled the commission kept close track of their attendance. Each person in the program received the same eight ounces and a half-pint of soup as those who could afford to pay. Those who paid for their rations were required to have their cards punched in the same manner as the destitute. At the end of the day the ration cards allowed the CRB to recognize who failed to appear and within an hour the mayor of the district or the priest of the parish would visit the home to find out if something was wrong. Economy was also an important part of the soup kitchen and ration program. To maintain accuracy each family was revisited every month to reassess their status of need individually. As a control mechanism to avoid over-issuing rations the communes were also required to pay sixty cents a month to the Comité National for every card used—regardless of destitute or able-to-pay usage.<sup>511</sup>

As active participants in the process of ravitaillement, the work of the delegate was classified under four primary categories: general services, supervision of guarantees, the handling of transportation, and the gathering of statistics. According to an internal CRB memorandum the most important functions of the delegate was to maintain representation in provinces and exemplify the commission's ideals in the constant rendering of aid and moral support. Edward Eyre Hunt concurred with the assessment, adding that among the variety of services provided by Americans in Belgium the top two were preventing requisitioning and seeing that every man, woman, and child received their daily bread. One of the hardest aspects

<sup>510</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:322.

<sup>511</sup> Honnold, *The Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 7. Another reason for handling ration cards in this manner at the soup kitchens was not to stigmatize the destitute. *World's World*, April 1915, p. 437. Honnold, *The Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 7.

of the delegates work was maintaining neutrality and though occasionally irritated by German attitudes they performed their duties admirably. According to commission representative T.B. Kittredge the question of keeping Belgium from starvation was infinitely more important than individuals' personal feelings. He recalled that undoubtedly their very presence, ceaseless moving about on inspection tours, communications with ministers in Brussels, and connection with the outside world materially affected the conduct of the Germans. Kittredge credited Hoover's firm stance and presence with being able to check the German general-government.<sup>512</sup>

For large measure the delegates were allowed a high degree of autonomy in the provinces. In many areas the American delegates attempted to work out for themselves some sort of control of operations within the communes. Local committees were also allowed so much independence that abuses began taking place. The CRB could not discharge its ravitaillement obligations in this capacity without an adequate force of Americans to act as delegates in the provinces to keep in close touch with the details of work. In the face of rogue behavior the commission decided to become more hands on.<sup>513</sup>

Once shipments began the commission began building up an American staff inside of Belgium to supervise the handing and distribution of food supplies, and personally investigate the German commitment to guarantees. To fulfill their duties the delegates would be required to work in daily association with the leading men of Belgium and with high-ranking German authorities, and be obliged to exercise diplomatic tact and discretion in both supervising the work of the Belgian committees and enforcing belligerent agreements. In total approximately 130-150 Americans served at various times as commission representatives between December 1914 and April 1917. Generally the CRB employed about 35 men at one time to serve its needs. Perrin

<sup>512</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 203. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 280. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 288. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 4:160.

<sup>513</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 262. Loc cit, p. 128.



Galpin of Yale was among the first ten selected to work in Belgium. Upon entering the field he was lectured upon the importance of the task and the great responsibilities he held and was cautioned of the necessity of maintaining absolute neutrality in word, act, and even in thought. Perrin recalled that commission delegates were so neutral “it hurt,” fearing to accept a smile for fear it would be misconstrued as an un-neutral act.<sup>514</sup>

In the early days of the war the commission delegate found his work enormously challenging. Francis Cogswell Wickes reported that Americans spent much of their time on the road, bouncing from one series of emergencies to another. The stresses of dealing with destroyed bridges blocking canals, derailed trains, wrecked trucks, and the imminent dangers of running out of food caused extremely high levels of stress. Delegates had a central office to work out of, but spent little time to spend there. When problems arose in the provinces it was his job alone to solve. Primary among the tasks of the delegate was to first see that sufficient foodstuffs arrived in the province, and then make sure that the supplies move properly into the regions and to the communes for consumption. In performing these duties the delegate was to act as an intermediary of communication between the various committees, the central committee, and the Germans and the CRB.<sup>515</sup>

By February 1915, the commission had issued a clear set of directives guiding American delegates through their duties in the field. On February 5, they were authorized to make investigations of the methods adopted by the provincial, regional, or communal committees in

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<sup>514</sup> Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 2:54. The commission preferred to use men with “European experience” and some knowledge of business and foreign languages, but admitted that individuals of this skill were hard to come by on such short notice. Loc cit, p. 1:8 and Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:478. Loc cit, p. 1:478. Under the initial plan for commission delegates the CRB estimated that it would use approximately 40 men at a time for the task. The usage of 37 delegates at any point met with commission expectations between 1914 and 1917. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 2:54. Loc cit, p. 2:55.

<sup>515</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:481. Loc cit, p. 1:482. Loc cit, p. 1:482-483.

order to ensure that supplies were distributed equally across the entire province. When difficulties or outright abuses were discovered the representative was instructed to make a thorough examination in the company of the provincial committee and give recommendations in accordance with that body. Admittedly, American delegates could not personally supervise and inspect the entire operations of the ten to twelve regional warehouses within his district. Generally they received daily, weekly, and monthly reports from the provincial committees regarding the distribution of food from the warehouse to the communes in absence of direct inspection. Delegates served in other important capacities beyond inspection and control of distribution as well. Education in particular was another valuable service rendered by Americans in the communes. In late-February, J.F. Lucey reported that Belgians were learning important things about American canned goods that come in the relief cargoes.<sup>516</sup>

In Belgium the delegate played a considerable role in the administration of business connected with the shipment and distribution of food imported by the CRB. Delegates in France however did not share the same freedoms of travel and inspection as the business of relief was handled almost exclusively by German officers and the French committees within the relief structure set up by the CRB and the general-government. While Belgian delegates traveled about in automobiles overseeing the progress of distribution, the French representatives spent most of their time riding around with a German officer or talking to French committee and warehouse managers. T.B. Kittredge recalled that in Belgium the delegate served as inspector generals and diplomatic representatives more than anything else. In the field it was “our business to know everything that was going on, (and) to see that the general policies were being carried out,” Kittredge added. Delegates also formed a close relationship with the provincial

<sup>516</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 175. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 181. *New York Times*, Feb 28, 1915. Lucey also observed that Belgians were “simply crazy” for American pork and beans.

committees by respecting the line between what was the business of the commission and the commune respectively. On the whole, Kittredge found that the authority of the delegates was never questioned and that for the most part they agreed with Hoover that power should only be exercised in the case of emergency.<sup>517</sup>

With immense freedom of action came great responsibility for the American delegates. Realizing that the success of ravitaillement depended on the character, ability, and versatility of the delegates, the commission carefully selected the individuals that worked directly with the Belgian population. At times the influence exercised by American delegates irritated members of the Comité National and the provincial committees however. James Morton of the commission in part agreed with the criticism, admitting that they “had to be very stingy stewards.” Behaviors of this sort were required in his opinion because if the CRB imported more than what was called for the entire project would have been questioned.<sup>518</sup>

Overall, T.B. Kittredge observed that the Belgians treated Americans “royally.” Heads of the provincial committees knew the work of the American delegate was valuable and realized that there was no reason to fear any abuses of power. At the local level they understood that the only aim of the delegate was to help the Belgians in every way possible. While delegates maintained their neutrality they were indeed sympathetic to the Belgian cause and formed close relationships through the experience. The fact that at least six members of the commission

<sup>517</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 152. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 4:164. Kittredge also found that the provincial committees were so responsive to the suggestions of the delegates that they accepted them sometimes on the spur of the moment without really thinking about it. Loc cit, p. 4:164.

<sup>518</sup> Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 1:8. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 196. Taillandier, *The Soul of the “CRB,”* p. 124.

married women they met in Belgium served as an example of the personalized nature of relief work.<sup>519</sup>

In an internal memorandum the commission explained in July 1915 that the most valued function in which it will stand out in memory is the relief of the destitute. At the heart of this program was the providing of food on a daily basis through the efforts of the communes and the commission. Covering the entire country the CRB created a system of canteens that supplied meals to the destitute for about eight cents a day. Since the outbreak of war the commission noticed steady increases destitution. By December 1914 the city of Brussels expanded operations to include fifteen canteens that fed more than 35,000 each day. While at times the supplies of food were sporadic, the bread lines and soup kitchens universally accepted that its first duty was to care for the destitute.<sup>520</sup>

Within the canteen system the commission paid careful attention not just to the distribution of relief but also to the quality of product it was serving as well. Mable Hyde Kittredge observed in mid-1915 that every recipe for soup was carefully worked out by trained dieticians and even the best way to peel potatoes was studied scientifically. The result was what Edward Eyre Hunt described as a ration of soup and bread of “excellent quality” for about ten to twelve cents a day per person. At the soup kitchens there were four varieties of soup including pea, bean, vegetable, and bouillon with variations being made to the recipe through the amount of rice available.<sup>521</sup>

Each morning work began at 2am with the lighting of gas stoves and culminated with the serving of several thousand meals between the hours of 11:30am and 1:15pm. During this lunch

<sup>519</sup> Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 4:159. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 288. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 4:159.

<sup>520</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:71. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:90. The canteens also provided special food for babies and meals for school children as well. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 294.

<sup>521</sup> Kittredge, *Taking Care of Belgium*, p. 7. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 294.

hour a relay of hot cauldrons kept soup coming so that those who arrived at the last minute were taken care of just as well as those at the front of the line. Every individual that received food brought their own spoon and carried a ration card with them bearing the name of the station, recipient, and containing blank spaces to indicate the date of delivery. Arno Dosch observed that workers and managers of the kitchens figured rations out down to such a detail that there were not fifty portions of bread and soup left when the doors closed in the afternoon. Most of the people serving meals at the kitchens were volunteers that included teachers, nuns, and priests specifically. Everyone had work assigned to them whether it was peeling potatoes, serving food, or supervising cooking.<sup>522</sup>

The strict discipline employed at the soup kitchens allowed them to provide daily meals as efficiently as possible. Edward Eyre Hunt was also struck by the apparent cleanliness of the Belgians themselves despite the rising levels of destitution. The fact that soup was never distributed for free during the war demonstrated the striking “self-respect” the civil population held for itself. Mable Hyde Kittredge on separate occasions observed that unlike most bread lines the Belgians displayed no looks of shame or humiliation. Efficiency of the kitchens combined with the self-respect of Belgians to create a remarkable system. In late-December 1914, Arno Dosch watched the provisional committee of Liege distribute bread to 50,000 people over a three hour period. Moving through a line four-deep the commission was able to keep a record of every loaf of bread distributed was kept. After seeing the impressive sight Dosch commented that “anyone who saw that hungry throng would stop eating bread himself to see that the Belgians got it.”<sup>523</sup>

<sup>522</sup> Kittredge, *Taking Care of Belgium*, p. 8 and Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 295. *World's World*, April 1915, p. 438. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 295. Loc cit, p. 295-296.

<sup>523</sup> The soup kitchens were also known for their clean appearance as much as its efficiency as well. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 295. Kittredge, *Taking Care of Belgium*, p. 8. *Yorkshire Observer*, December 24, 1914.

## CHAPTER TWELVE: *Providing the “Last Bread of a Final Freedom”*

### **The German Army of Occupation in Belgium**

In Belgium the German general government quickly assumed the powers of the Belgian state after occupation began. The general contempt the civilian population held for the German interpretation of public interests led to administrative problems throughout the war.

Regardless of the situation the tense relationship created animosity on both sides. Vernon

Kellogg reported that German officers literally referred to Belgians as “idiots and ingrates.” In Berlin a dispatch from the Wolff Telegraph Agency explained on November 25, 1914 that the Germans thought of Belgians with angry bitterness, blaming them for spoiling their plans.

“Nothing is too bad for the Belgians,” they exclaimed, “let the Belgians take care of themselves.”

Governor-General von Bissing agreed with the assessment. In a February 1915 interview with the Associated Press he described the Belgians as “politically undisciplined children,” but added that the situation was “as good as could be expected in the circumstances.”<sup>524</sup>

Resentment combined with suspicion to create a precarious situation. Whitlock observed that the general-government was constantly haunted by fears that the Comité National might become a government within a government and challenge the Germans for power across the country. In June, 1915 the governor-general informed the minister-patrons of the CRB that all tendencies on the part of the Comité to monopolize the distribution of charity must be stopped immediately. While the occupational forces pressed to consolidate power they raised no objections to ravitaillement. In April 1915 von der Lancken reaffirmed that the general-government would continue to respect all assurances given through the CRB. By the 1915 harvest the commission was officially recognized as the stewards of Belgium, receiving 15,000

<sup>524</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:32. Kellogg, Vernon. *Headquarter Nights*. (Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1917), p. 65. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 101. *New York Times*, Feb 7, 1915, p. 4.

tons of domestic wheat from the Germans and importing an additional 55,000 tons for the civil population.<sup>525</sup>

In Belgium the Germans set up a civil rather than a military government based out of Brussels. At the top the supreme authority and source of all power and privilege in Belgium was held by the governor-general. Appointed by the Kaiser, the governor-general answered to the Emperor alone and wielded complete political authority as the head of the occupying government. By decree the powers formerly appertaining to the King of Belgium were transferred to the governor-general. Once in place the general-government was divided into several departments and sections to serve its needs.<sup>526</sup>

As the general government expanded its powers in Belgium it took a particular interest in burgeoning efforts relieve hunger. The unexpectedly rapid expansion of relief in scope and importance under the CRB and the Comité National convinced the general-government that they needed to both limit the powers of benevolence and expand their official participation in ravitaillement measures. In 1915, Governor-General von Bissing asks the Comité to clearly define its actions and intentions in order to avoid conflict. To better understand the purpose and mission of the committee he instructed German authorities to maintain closer contacts with the provincial committees by attending their sub-committee meetings and actually participating in the proceedings. In addition, the general-government set up the Central Crop Commission

<sup>525</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:576. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 312. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:128 and Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:576. Loc cit, p. 1:576.

<sup>526</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 136. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:442. Loc cit, p. 1:444. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 27. In 1914, the Imperial government appointed a governor-general that presided over the entire country except for parts of Flanders immediately behind the front lines. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 5:277. The department that the CRB and the Comité National dealt with most directly was the political department headed by Baron von der Lancken who bore the title of Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Governor-General in Belgium. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 28. The general-government also announced that Military governors were assuming the powers of the Provincial governors and the roles of the Commissioners of Arrondissements were now filled by German Kreischefs. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:444.

governed by five Germans, one Belgian, and one American to handle crop requisitions and native harvest distribution. Under its direction a maximum price was set for crops purchased from farmers and flour sold to Belgians with the goal of assisting the Comité National and the CRB in its purchase and distribution of foodstuffs.<sup>527</sup>

After the 1915 harvest the general-government took a final step toward normalizing relations with relief by creating the *Vermittlungsstelle*. Aimed at eliminating much of the confusion and competition among departments for authority in the affairs of relief the bureau became the official channel through which the CRB and the Comité National secured new guarantees from the Germans while functioning as an intermediary between the governor-general and the patron-ministers of relief. Through its operations the general-government kept in closer contact with the CRB and as a result viewed benevolence with much greater sympathy than before. The *Vermittlungsstelle* also improved the efficiency of decision making by allowing the commission to receive immediate information on matters that could potentially delay the process of ravitaillement by directly intervening. Despite their differences the CRB and the *Vermittlungsstelle* continued to work collaboratively until American delegates resigned their posts in April 1917. During this period their relations were generally marked by a harmony and close cooperation not found before the collaboration began.<sup>528</sup>

<sup>527</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:55. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:658. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 314. Also known as the Central Harvest Commission, its members included the governor-general himself, an official from the civil department, an official from the bank department, an official from the military department, an official from the political department, a Belgian from the Comité National, and an American from the CRB. Vernon Kellogg commented that while the Belgian and American members received full voting privileges within the harvest commission they were “tolerated rather than welcomed.” Kellogg, *Headquarter Nights*, p. 73. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 314.

<sup>528</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:374. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 234. The creation of the *Vermittlungsstelle* could not eliminate all sources of conflict however. Even after the department was in place the periodical searches of delegates continued to make life extremely unpleasant for those who were stationed near the border. Loc cit, p. 287. Loc cit, p. 235.



For administrative purposes the German general-government also made distinctions between what it considered the Army Zone and the Occupational Zone in Belgium. Covering a strip of territory fifty miles wide between the Verdun and the North Sea, the Army Zone was controlled by the German armies directly. In addition, two other regions known as the Operations Zone and the Étappen Zone made up a twelve mile section extending behind the actual front lines and the Zones of Operation and Occupation. Subject only to the higher authority of the supreme commander the German army imposed absolute rule on the Operation and Étappen Zones. In both regions the armies assumed control of property, food, and currency. Personal freedoms were also eliminated creating a situation for the population akin to being actual prisoners of war.<sup>529</sup>

The division of administration in the Occupation and Army Zones had an important bearing on the problems of native produce specifically. Relief negotiations covering areas in the Occupation Zone were handled in large measure through diplomatic channels while the details of control were worked out in conjunction with the Comité National and German civil officials. In general there were fewer disturbances of local institutions and greater individual freedoms available in the Occupation Zone than in regions closer to the front lines controlled by the military. The situation in the Army Zone was also more complicated and delicate because the Germans had a direct hand in producing crops. At the front lines the commander-in-chief of the military (Étappen) zone was not bound by documents signed by the governor-general and in the experience of the commission was often difficult to deal with. In this case the CRB was forced

<sup>529</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:392.

to deal directly with military authorities in regards to both protection and distribution of native produce.<sup>530</sup>

On occasion the relations between the commission's delegates and German military were strained, but for the most part the influence of Americans were always significant enough to allow the CRB to discharge its duties without severe breaks in service. With its operations firmly set in the Occupation Zones the commission began extending relief into the Belgian Étapes where it secured an extension of import guarantees for the region. The problem requiring further negotiations involved the Germans refusal to apply guarantees from the Occupational Zone to these regions however. In response the British Foreign Office warned Hoover and the CRB that unless they secured further concessions from the German military they would prohibit future imports into the Étappen. During negotiations the jealousy German officers held for the authority of American delegates slowed the process of negotiation. Undaunted the commission made the best of the situation, presenting its case for benevolence through informal channels as well as through direct relations with military officers.<sup>531</sup>

Throughout Belgium the Germans adapted their administrative system as much as possible to the existing political divisions. As a part of this process the general-government also endeavored to keep the structure of Belgian local government intact. Within the general-government structure the two principal departments (general and civil) extended down into the nine provinces through a military governor with the rank of General and a president of the *Zivilverwaltung* who replaced the Belgian governor. At the communal/arrondissement level the Germans also placed a *Kreischef* with the rank of Colonel. Although the general government

<sup>530</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:510. Loc cit, p. 1:391-392. Loc cit, p. 1:510. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:91. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:510.

<sup>531</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:561.

structure was intricate and exact, the entire country was not treated as a single administrative unit. Governor-General von der Goltz and later von Bissing controlled only about two-thirds of the occupied territory that included Antwerp, Brussels, Liège, Namur, Dinant, and Mons. Separately, Ghent was controlled by a general of Étappen-Inspection and while Bruges was under the stewardship of the Admiral of the Imperial Navy. Along the front lines, each army corps composed a separate unit of government responsible only to the General Staff Headquarters at Charleville or the Kaiser himself. The result according to Whitlock was a heavy, cumbersome, complicated machine that rumbled on remorselessly. He added that once it was set in motion there was not stopping, turning aside, or adapting it to sudden exigencies.<sup>532</sup>

Cracks in the façade of German administration quickly became apparent to the delegates of the CRB stationed across Belgium. To many of the commission's delegates working in close contact with the German general-government the experience revealed an "absurdly over-managed and inefficiently managed" system. Vernon Kellogg confidently believed that the German government proved itself incapable—except in cases where brute force alone worked—of managing affairs in Belgium. He predicted that eventually the "Frankenstein" machine would turn on its own creators and self-destruct.<sup>533</sup>

Initially the supervision of the Belgian communes and the details of food distribution were turned over to Dr. von Sandt of the civil government. Under his guidance the complicated lines of authority within the German government made it difficult for the commission to secure prompt responses in matters of relief from the general-government and at the same time also made it harder for the Germans to know exactly what the CRB was doing. The consequence was

<sup>532</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 27. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:449. Loc cit, p. 1:450. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 170. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:440.

<sup>533</sup> Kellogg, *Headquarter Nights*, p. 75. Loc cit, p. 83.

a continual friction and an increased level of suspicion that culminated with a series of espionage charges against the commission. It was not until the Germans created the *Vermittlungsstelle* that these problems were at least in part resolved. Meanwhile, the occupying forces continued to ride roughshod over Belgium. On May 19, 1915 the *Morning Post* in Britain reported that “it is clear that the theft and plunder which has taken place could only have gone on with the complicity of the German authorities.” Whitlock concurred with the assessment of the British paper. In a letter to President Wilson he explained that “the fact is that the Germans have not governed Belgium at all; they have simply exploited it, wrung from it the fruits of its toil and of its industries.”<sup>534</sup>

Maintaining order was one of the most difficult tasks the German general government faced in its administration of Belgium during the war. Embodied by the personality of Governor-General von Bissing, no detail of control was beyond the interests of the general-government. Among these interests was one of the aspects of administration that the Germans struggled with the most—negative public opinion, patriotism, and resistance. Efforts by the general-government to control all means of press and propaganda failed to thwart the continued appearance of an underground newspaper called *La Libre Belgique*. Despite a bounty of fifty thousand francs for the paper’s editor (or editors) and severe penalties for distribution, the newspaper “puzzled and exasperated” the Germans according to Edward Eyre Hunt.<sup>535</sup>

A critical component of the German efforts to maintain order and control in Belgium was couched in the legal system it adopted in the occupied territories. Field Marshal von der Goltz in particular came to Belgium announcing that “the punishment for hostile acts falls not only on the

<sup>534</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 189. *Morning Post*, May 19, 1915. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:222.

<sup>535</sup> After his death on April 18, 1917, Kellogg concluded that the governor-general “died from too much telling the Belgians to do things—some important, many trivial—and too much trying to make them do them.” Kellogg, *Headquarter Nights*, p. 61. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 332. Rumors circulated that the paper was printed in an obscure garage by means of an automobile engine.

guilty, but on the innocent as well.” As time passed the Germans tightened their control over Belgium through the mechanisms of their military-legal framework. By late summer 1915 the general-government executed larger numbers of individuals as spies or traitors under a broad legal definition for perpetrators of the crime as anyone who committed an act considered inimical to German interests. Serving as a functional component of the general-government’s “wearing-down process,” Robert Withington observed that people of all ranks were taken. In his opinion the fact that Germans considered them “undesirable” was sufficient to render a trial unnecessary.<sup>536</sup>

Accompanying the legal system was the installation of the complex German military code which allowed the general-government to issue *affiches* (decrees) at its convenience to suit their needs. Whitlock reported that it was standard practice for the Germans to arrest people “on suspicion” and investigate afterward. Expediting this process was the fact that at least in Brussels the word of a German soldier was sufficient to convict a Belgian of anything. The accuser was not required to give any evidence of fact, much less prove the accusation—mere assertion of wrongdoing was to prove guilt. For those who were arrested and put on trial the tribunals that dispatched justice were known to disregard every principle of justice and liberty that defined the Latin and Anglo-Saxon legal systems.<sup>537</sup>

The influence of the German military in Belgium was in many respects universal. According to Whitlock there was a “certain gruesome monotony” in the stories he was told about Germans entering villages, taking hostages, and demanding money and supplies. When relations turned sour within a couple of days they murdered, burned, pillaged, raped, and massacred the

<sup>536</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:219. Loc cit, p. 2:62. Withington, *In Occupied Belgium*, p. 82.

<sup>537</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:464. Whitlock explained that the German military code was a complex mystery that no lawyer of Latin or Anglo-Saxon culture would attempt to explain. Loc cit, p. 2:87-89. Loc cit, p. 1:224. Loc cit, p. 1:463.

town. When Kellogg pressed his officer for an explanation about the wrecked villages they passed he received a “stereotyped” answer of “punishment.” In his experience he was certain that even the officer didn’t exactly know why. Even with all the explanations used by the Germans claiming biological superiority the treatment of Belgians still could not be justified.<sup>538</sup>

At times the steadfast mindset of the Germans proved almost too much to deal with for members of the commission. Whitlock wrote in his journal on September 22, 1915 that there were two distinct German elements present in Belgium: the civil that could be reasoned and the military element that had “gone crazy.” He concluded that there was nothing to be done but try to realize that there was a vast gulf between the two irreconcilable points of view and the antipathetic attitudes towards the preservation of life. The only thing the commission could do from his perspective was keep on feeding Belgium. Robert Withington added that German logic was “pitiless,” believing that you were either with us or against us. In his view the Germans had no place for neutrality in their scheme unless it helped them directly.<sup>539</sup>

In a situation Whitlock labeled as “fortunate,” the CRB dealt exclusively with the German civil government in Belgium. While they were generally polite and affable, Whitlock found them at the same time to be obnoxious, slow, and extremely bureaucratic. Robert Withington added that the *Kreischef* of his district was considered a “Belgian-hater” and out of touch with the people. Kellogg succinctly summarized the situation from his perspective that the Germans “never got it.” In his view the absence of Belgian approval of the German

<sup>538</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:215. Kellogg, *Headquarter Nights*, p. 54. Loc cit, p. 54-55.

<sup>539</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:212. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:541. Withington, *In Occupied Belgium*, p. 60. Withington added that if relief efforts benefited the Germans than they would have lost their neutrality status. He also observed that many Germans did not understand why the US was not an automatic ally of Germany once it stopped all shipments of munitions to belligerents. Loc cit, p. 60-61.

administration combined with a complete lack of any rapprochement between German officers and the civil population to demonstrate that they utterly lacked “human consideration.”<sup>540</sup>

Problems the Germans faced in matters of civil administration belied a general inability to understand the sentiments of Belgians and the motivations of the commission. Kellogg eventually gave up on answering the question “Why do you Americans do as you do?” German officers told him and other members of the CRB that fundamentally “everything you do surprises them, disappoints them, (and) dismays them.” When the tables were turned in regards to questioning, Edward Eyre Hunt was told that, “We must obey. We trust our government because it is wiser than we and because it does better for us than we can do for ourselves.” The difference to the Germans was clear, “Your country is so different from ours that you do not yet understand the virtue of obedience.”<sup>541</sup>

The perceived irrationality and misunderstanding of the Germans caused tremendous difficulties for the commission as it performed its duties or ravitaillement. Whitlock complained in March 1915 that the general government never understood the organization of the CRB nor comprehended the difficulties of feeding nearly eight million people a month. He added that even General von Bissing failed to understand the demands of relief, thinking that it was a small charity created by Daniel Heineman to distribute a little food in soup kitchens and a few old pieces of clothing to the poor. Conflict between the commission and the general government came to a head over a comment made by von Bissing in an interview saying that “the work of America in Belgium was not charity at all, but a business, if not something worse.” Hoover in

<sup>540</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:441. Whitlock reported that the bureaucratic machine was a times problematic when important letters or requests would become “caught in the cogs of the terrible machine” and become lost for weeks if not forever. Withington, *In Occupied Belgium*, p. 93. Kellogg, *Headquarter Nights*, p. 80. According to Kellogg the “mal-administration” of Belgium was also sufficient proof that the Germans were unable to help the world in its efforts to humanize and socialize mankind. He believed moreover that it was wholly unnecessary and inefficient for the Germans to imposed pseudo-control over all affairs in Belgium. Loc cit, p. 95.

<sup>541</sup> Kellogg, *Headquarter Nights*, p. 63. Loc cit, p. 63-64. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 45.

response threatened to terminate all relief efforts unless the general retracted his statement. It was these dual elements of immaturity and constant bewilderment on the part of German officers that particularly irritated Whitlock.<sup>542</sup>

Resentment towards the commission and its representatives accompanied doubts as to the CRB's true intentions in providing relief. German Lieutenant Herbster told Edward Eyre Hunt in late 1914 that America was "a nation of sentimental fools," wondering why "you want to feed these *franc-tireurs*, these barbarians of Belgium." "If you did the right thing," he added, "you would give the German army the food that you are bringing over for these wretches..." Representatives of the commission persevered under the constant pressures of the general-government. James Morton commented that delegates settled on the conviction that they would not altogether see the Germans as the "Beasts of the Apocalypse." Their belief was that relief was in a manner of speaking the last bread of a final freedom.<sup>543</sup>

### **The Problems of Ravitaillement**

August 20, 1915 marked the one year anniversary of the Belgian invasion. Brand Whitlock wrote in his journal that over the past year the "effect upon the life of the Belgians has been death." Edward Eyre Hunt succinctly summarized the situation by saying that the Germans wanted two things from Belgium: quiet and cash. Whitlock observed that increasingly during 1915 the civil population was depressed and beginning to lose hope in the wake of steady efforts by the Germans to demoralize and humiliate the people. According to the American minister the process was all part of a methodical plan that began with terrorizing Belgium by committing atrocities followed by unconscionable oppression and completed by crushing the people's spirit

<sup>542</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:107. Loc cit, p. 2:144. On February 23, 1915 Whitlock wrote in his journal that Heineman appeared to be the one person that the Germans trusted. Loc cit, p. 2:104.

Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:578. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:xix.

<sup>543</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 167. Taillandier, *The Soul of the "CRB,"* p. 128.



one discouragement at a time. By the end of 1915, after fifteen months of occupation the Germans continued to dictate the terms of law in Belgium, claiming and exercising the right to eliminate laws and make new ones through decrees issued by the governor-general.<sup>544</sup>

The work of the commission became all the more important especially at a time when resolve in Belgium was put to the test. Representative Prentiss N. Gray commented that the presence of Americans helped to turn a measure of Belgians thoughts away from the horrors of occupation and allowed them to emphasize the fact that there was still human kindness in this world. Grey believed that delegates found joy in thinking about the institution that was saving them from starvation as the only piece of constructive work in a war of destruction. The Germans themselves also found the CRB valuable. Beyond its efforts in conjunction with the provinces and the communes to distribute food, the general-government saw that the commission possessed an advantage in securing permits and funding from Allied and neutral countries for imports.<sup>545</sup>

While the general-government allowed food to enter the country it did so in a manner that did not sacrifice its strategic advantages. Keeping military exigencies in mind, the Germans maintained control of the Belgian railway system which forced the CRB to use canal and waterway system to transport goods. Claims of military exigency forced the commission to be constantly vigilant against requisitions. Whitlock complained in early 1915 that despite having all the assurances in the world they were seemingly valueless in preventing food seizures. Slowly the Germans began to realize that the commission had only one objective in Belgium and that was to feed the civil population. Although it took a considerable amount of time, T.B.

<sup>544</sup> Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:205. Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 174. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:142. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 27.

<sup>545</sup> Withington, *In Occupied Belgium*, p. 136. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 104.

Kittredge concluded that the consistent record of the two hundred Americans that served in Belgium ultimately proved even to the general-government that they were faithfully living up to the pledges given to the CRB, Hoover, Britain, the neutral world, and Germany.<sup>546</sup>

The weight of German administration was everywhere to be found in Belgium. Everything from raw materials to butcher shops, playhouse shows, and schools were regulated by the general-government. While the Germans were fascinated with controlling the civil population they apparently were utterly inept at understanding the work of the commission. The work of the CRB's delegates was immensely complicated under the constant accusations of spying or interloping. According to Whitlock the German military had no respect for civil authority whatsoever. Over approximately the first six months of relief the CRB possessed a self-policing power that removed some of the direct pressure of the general-government from them. Until July 1915, both the provincial committees and the commission were permitted to punish infractions of the rules by either levying fines or withdrawing supplies for a specified period of time. Afterward the commission was subject to the same processes of Belgian law as the civil population.<sup>547</sup>

German obstacles to relief intensified under the guise that the commission enjoyed too many liberties in Belgium. The general-government wholeheartedly disliked the idea of having a considerable number of Americans freely traveling about a conquered territory so close to the front lines. In January 1915, von Bissing commented that the commission only needed a few men permanently stationed at the central warehouses while Belgians attend to the entire work of distribution under their direct supervision. They regarded Americans working for the CRB as

<sup>546</sup> Taillandier, *The Soul of the "CRB,"* p. 121. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock,* p. 2:85. Whitlock observed that Americans were seen as "a precious lot of soft fools for sending over the food to this poor people." Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium,* p. 132.

<sup>547</sup> Hunt, *War Bread,* p. 47. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock,* p. 2:88. Hunt, *War Bread,* p. 309.

“troublesome intruders” that should not be allowed to have an active role in distribution beyond seeing that relief supplies were not requisitioned by German troops.<sup>548</sup>

The resulting actions by German officers in lieu of these beliefs frustrated commission representatives to no end. In an article appearing in the February 28, 1915 edition of the *New York Times*, J.F. Lucey reported that “it looked to us as though we had to fight for every foot of ground to get into any commune or to enter any city. We seemed to be interfered with in every effort we made to perfect our distribution organization.” In many cases the positive reception that the American members of the commission received was in particular seen as a dangerous subversive threat. In their view the CRB was keeping Belgium from maintaining its naturally submissive position. Conditions for the American delegates were as a result made as uncomfortable as possible in order to combat the tendency of the commission to foment opposition to the general-government.<sup>549</sup>

In order to blunt the influence of the commission its delegates were subjected to many kinds of petty annoyances at the hands of German authorities. Vernon Kellogg observed that constantly the American contingent was told that their efforts would not count. T.B. Kittredge recalled that “at first we were all regarded as possible spies...” Under such suspicions many representatives were arrested by local commandants. Even when mass accusations of spying subsided in 1915 the general-government continued to conduct extensive searches. In several cases a few unfortunate delegates languished for days in German prisons before news of their

<sup>548</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 128. Loc cit, p. 130. Loc cit, p. 104. According to Kittredge the appearance of Americans working for the CRB gave the people of Belgium a sense of security that made them feel that they possessed a bit of protection from the Germans. Kittredge observed that it was undoubtedly galling to the Germans, who regarded themselves as masters of the country, to see Americans, who were themselves unafraid of them and beyond their direct control, dashing about the country in automobiles overseeing relief. He also added that accompanying officers were also infuriated by the enthusiastic reception American delegates received from Belgians as they passed. Loc cit, p. 128.

<sup>549</sup> *New York Times*, Feb 28, 1915. In his estimation the Germans never considered that a neutral nation would enter the same occupied territory with the purpose of feeding and building while they were killing and destroying. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 129.

incarceration reached Brussels and orders for release could be secured. J.F. Lucey added that his men were constantly held up and often detained (himself included). Eventually as German posts became more accustomed to the passing of delegates they made less trouble but still found excuses to delay representatives for an hour or two at checkpoints. Even a decree issued by the governor-general which gave assurances that no member of the commission would be bodily searched unless directly ordered failed to change the situation. James Morton summarized the position that representatives were in as one of “superintendents who were superintended.”<sup>550</sup>

Under constant suspicion for any number of acts against the general government the representatives of the commission were all the more compelled to maintain strict neutrality. As a result the CRB took steps to protect both the future of relief and its participants by promising not to carry verbal or written messages from Belgians under any circumstances. An added level of oversight was created by requiring that all incoming and outgoing letters pass through English and German censors. Six specific rules governing all correspondence were also set in agreement between the CRB and the general-government. In behavior the commission’s delegates understood that as long as the Germans kept their word and did not interfere or requisition relief supplies it was the CRB’s business to keep silent. Chairman Hoover explicitly instructed representatives that “you have nothing to do there except to see that the wheat arrives, that it is made into bread, and the bread is eaten by those for whom it was meant. If it is hard to say nothing, remember that silence is the price of food for those people.”<sup>551</sup>

<sup>550</sup> Kellogg, *Germany in the War and After*, p. 72. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 188. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 4:159. *New York Times*, February 28, 1915. Lucey added that passes/passports were their only protection and even when they possessed them they were still taken into custody. In his view the military problem was “the most annoying in the lot.” Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 188. Loc cit, p. 189. Taillandier, *The Soul of the “CRB,”* p. 146.

<sup>551</sup> Withington, *In Occupied Belgium*, p. 31. Loc cit, p. 30. These rules included: (1) that letters were not to exceed four pages in length, (2) that letters were to be typewritten if possible or very clearly handwritten, (3) no references were to be made directly or indirectly to matters concerning the war or operations/affairs of the CRB, (4) specified the addresses to send all correspondence to for censor, (5) stated that the New York, London, and Rotterdam offices

Remaining silent was one of the toughest parts of the job for delegates. Americans in Belgium were subject to constant criticisms and threats claiming that among others accusations their relief work was in no sense neutral because it kept hostages alive whose suffering might otherwise affect the minds and fighting power of the enemy. In plain terms the commission was constantly accused by the Germans of prolonging the war. Robert Withington commented that under such pressure the delegates had to steer a delicate course in not getting too familiar with either the Germans or the Belgians in a manner that would cause suspicion. The only time when representatives showed any trace of partisanship was when they spoke of Hoover. Still the task of performing duties under the yoke of the general-government and in the sight of the suffering and horror in Belgium was heart wrenching. "I went into Northern France and Belgium to act as a neutral, and I did act as a neutral all the time I was there," Vernon Kellogg concluded, "but I came out no neutral."<sup>552</sup>

In order to perform their duties each representative of the commission was provided with an accompanying officer, a home, orderlies, and a set of circumscribed powers within the assigned province. The German officer detailed to the delegate was commonly referred to as their "nurse." The relationship between the two was described by John Lowrey Simpson as "a composite of the Siamese twins, a Punch and Judy show, a parliamentary debate, and important quantities of high explosives." He added that the situation was "essentially and fundamentally peculiar" in that the American was sent to watch the food and the German officer was sent to watch the American. Speaking on the relationship, Whitlock commented that under the best circumstances the interplay would be difficult; under the conditions that actually prevailed it was

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of the CRB were notified weekly about the "health of members in Belgium," and (6) failure to observe these regulations would render letters undeliverable. Taillandier, *The Soul of the "CRB,"* p. 147.

<sup>552</sup> Taillandier, *The Soul of the "CRB,"* p. 124. Withington, *In Occupied Belgium,* p. 31. Taillandier, *The Soul of the "CRB,"* p. 81. Kellogg, *Headquarter Nights,* p. 55.

almost intolerable. Under their supervision the eyes of the German officers were never off the CRB delegates as they “watched him when he rose to eat and when he knelt to pray.”<sup>553</sup>

While the general-government and the accompanying officers looked upon delegates as unpleasant intruders the commission possessed an advantage in that the Germans realized the necessity of its work and was willing to yield on many points rather than face the discontinuance of ravitaillement. American representatives often found that while officers absolutely refused to permit any definite action or individual initiative, they would usually carry out the change or measure demanded by the delegate under their own authority. In general, the Germans found it exceedingly humiliating to feel that as rulers of an occupied territory they were being monitored by an agency from the outside whose activities they regarded as suspicious. Officers particularly did not like delegates complaining to Brussels when things were not going well in the provinces. Whenever possible the accompanying officer would personally remedy any abuses while adamantly refusing that there was any base to the delegate’s complaint. In the face of constant pressure the American delegates performed their duties with what Whitlock called “admirable patience.” German officers commonly asked commission representatives “what are the Americans getting out of it?” The answer was that millions of people received their daily bread...that was “all the Americans got out of it.”<sup>554</sup>

Conditions for commission members changed in step with the nature of relief work in Belgium. In the first four months of relief work (October 1914 through January 1915) the general-government was gracious in granting passes and allowing delegates to exercise freedom of movement. Once the work of the commission expanded in volume and importance the

<sup>553</sup> Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 5:277. Kellogg, *Headquarter Nights*, p. 50. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:494. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:572.

<sup>554</sup> Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 4:159. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 328. Loc cit, p. 132. Loc cit, p. 329. Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 1:572.

attitude of the governor-general became less accommodating. The Germans in particular feared that the supposedly-neutral body was becoming too powerful in a territory where German rule was theoretically absolute.<sup>555</sup>

The balance of power between the commission delegate and the German accompanying officer often created a delicate situation. John Lowrey Simpson commented that in focusing on the arrogant usurpations of power made by German officers the commission was at times too little inclined to remember the valuable services rendered by these individuals in regards to their handling of municipal affairs, controlling soldiers, and facilitating the work of CRB representatives. In general these officers served as a buffer between the American and domestic organizations on the one hand and the German army on the other. According to Simpson as time passed the accompanying officer became more than just a *Begleitoffizier*. When personnel began to change the officers gained the advantage of an “old hand” over a “green” delegate. With every new American replacement in the communes the accompanying officer edged his advantage further. Eventually these individuals were no longer officially called an accompanying officer; they assumed the title of *Verpflegungsoffizier*, an “officer dealing with matters of feeding.” The commission was well aware of the greater powers assumed by German officers and labored on its part to check the gradual encroachments of the general government.<sup>556</sup>

<sup>555</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:46. Loc cit, p. 1:46-47. In part the general-government also disapproved of the enthusiasm that Belgians showed towards American delegates when they traveled on inspection tours.

<sup>556</sup> Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 1:501. Simpson explained that accompanying officers specifically dealt with railway officials and local commandants; arranged to have storehouses and offices put at the disposal of the provincial committees; sent telegrams on behalf of delegates; ousted soldiers from bakeries; and escorted representative into villages well within the zones of artillery fire. Simpson also recognized at the same time that the accompanying officers’ control of communication gave them considerable power over delegates by censoring all incoming and outgoing letters. The tension created some heated exchanges between delegate and officer, particularly over the power to censor. Loc cit, p. 1:501-502. Loc cit, p. 1:502. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 325.

In the provinces the accompanying officers had other duties assigned to them beyond the watching of delegates including the supervision and distribution of imported food and controlling the native produce. Over the course of time the *Begleitoffiziers* and *Verpflegungsoffiziers* came to take into their hands most of the details involving the work of provisioning in Northern France specifically. As a part of their responsibilities they were to accompany the delegates about the district and keep them out of “mischief,” intervene on their behalf with the military authorities, read their correspondence, and send their communications through telephone and telegraph. For the most part these officers showed a great deal of interest and took an immense pride in the work of the commission. Some of the German officers even came to consider themselves part of the CRB effort.<sup>557</sup>

In Northern France most of the officers adhered to the obligations of their position and genuinely cared about the welfare of the population. Because it was their duty to see that promises were kept these individuals came to regard any violation of German guarantees in France as a personal reflection upon themselves. As a rule these officers were efficient and mature men that gradually began under their own initiative or by the inspiration of general headquarters to assume a more direct role in relief operations. James Harder commented that “our duties in the CRB brought us into contact with some officers who were almost good-natured.” Kittredge added that “the officers assigned to work with us had the interests of the population at heart, for the most part, and they were as zealous as we in seeing that everything went well.” He concluded that as a rule the accompanying officers were “well disposed towards

<sup>557</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 325. Loc cit, p. 152. Loc cit, p. 324. Loc cit, p. 152.



us, cosmopolitan in culture, conscientious in the performance of their duty and in helping us to make sure that the food was fairly distributed and that none of it went to the Germans.”<sup>558</sup>

The dichotomy in Northern France was that while officers gradually encroached on the privileges and powers of the delegates they were also a source of consistency in the process of ravitaillement as turn-over rates among CRB representatives grew. As new delegates arrived at their posts ignorant of the conditions within the district they became increasingly dependent on the accompanying officers for assistance in acclimating them to the situation. No reports of serious difficulties between the CRB and German authorities surfaced during the first year of the commission's work in Northern France. The troublesome and petty difficulties which led to constant friction in Belgium were alleviated in France through the close cooperation between the American delegate and the German officers. Relations between the CRB and the general-government improved as time passed. Kittredge recalled that “on the whole the Germans ended up trusting us, and it must be said that in many ways they greatly facilitated our work.” The German officers that were in personal contact with the CRB were known to be extremely courageous and more agreeable beginning in late 1915 until the deportation of workers began in 1916.<sup>559</sup>

<sup>558</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 152. T.B. Kittredge observed that any violation of German agreements and guarantees were taken as personal affronts to the authority of accompanying officers. According to Kittredge, “with the support of the German Headquarters we had little or no trouble keeping things well.” Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 5:284. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 324. Taillandier, *The Soul of the “CRB,”* p. 43. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 5:284. Kittredge explained that any violation by local German authorities (in regards to agreements and guarantees) were taken. Loc cit, p. 5:278. Kittredge also concluded that some of the accompanying officers too a sincere interest in the population and did all they could to help in the often difficult work of getting the meager rations spread equitably so that the population could be spared the possibility of interruptions of supply.

<sup>559</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 153. Loc cit, p. 206. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 4:159. Specifically, the Germans kept the commission supplied with railcars, helped shipments move promptly to the distributing centers, permitted the CRB to use military telephone and telegraph lines for urgent business, and were careful to avoid seizing any relief supplies. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 288.

While relations between the CRB and the general-government became more normalized in 1915 this did not mean that an amiable relationship between the two organizations was permanently in place. Whitlock worried in the late 1915 that everyone was near the breaking point. At the time the number of Germans in towns across Belgium seemed to increase daily to the point that they swarmed everywhere. Whitlock complained that the additional numbers became so great that it created a new problem for ravitaillement. Representatives of the commission began to wonder that if the Germans could not requisition imported food then maybe they were gradually shifting their entire population over the border into Belgium to be fed. Vernon Kellogg reported that as German control intensified the new national sport of Germany appeared to be lying. Making matters worse, the commission observed that the *Vermittlungsstelle* hampered rather than facilitated relief work in moving beyond its original intent of observation into outright intervention after December 1915.<sup>560</sup>

Relations improved little in the first months of 1916. By this point many German officers were inclined to assume a domineering attitude in their administration of affairs in Belgium. With a lofty conception of their duties to the German army and responsibility to their country these officers considered it part of their work to sidetrack American delegates. The American representatives by contrast were for the most part capable and energetic individuals who harbored no fear or respect for the German military system. The only considerations that swayed them were their obligations to the general population and the CRB. While delegates endeavored to perform their duties admirably the situation was beginning to take its toll. On March 31, 1916

<sup>560</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 2:174-175. Loc cit, p. 2:57. Kellogg, *Germany in the War and After*, p. 31. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 292.

Whitlock reported that of the 150 men who came to Belgium there were two in insane asylums while thirty other men suffered from nervous breakdowns.<sup>561</sup>

By 1916 the commission had other complicating factors to deal with in providing relief as well. Beyond the pilfering soldier the work of ravitaillement had to deal with an army of brokers, speculators, smugglers, and knaves who were in Whitlock's words "trafficking in the misery and suffering of the land." Despite the best efforts of the commission and General von Bissing himself the wily efforts of profiteers could not be stooped. Smuggling became such a problem that by mid-1916 soldiers entered farms to try to buy eggs or chickens to feed themselves. Meanwhile the general-government expanded its powers further through decrees of the governor-general. Whitlock complained in the summer of 1916 that it was quite impossible for the commission to live up to so many regulations and still perform its duties. The major obstacle to relief at the time was that the Germans believed that the Belgians had more to eat than the Germans.<sup>562</sup>

As fall of 1916 began the commission recognized that the situation was growing more difficult to control. Under the supervision of the *Vermittlungsstelle* if the CRB reported that soldiers were taking food the military darkly responded with renewed accusations of spying. Vernon Kellogg commented that overall the relationship between representatives and German officialdom made relief work difficult under the most favorable circumstances. Constant harassment, delays, tricks, and bullying under the cover of sophisticated and specious reasoning made the work of delegates extremely trying. Kellogg added that one of the most prolific sources of difficulty was the lack of clear demarcation among the many "wheels and parts of the

<sup>561</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 325. Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, p. 2:252.

<sup>562</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 2:327. Loc cit, p. 2:324. Loc cit, p. 2:383. Loc cit, p. 2:378. In a meeting between von Bissing, Hoover, and Kellogg the governor-general suggested that Belgium should be rationed on the same scale that the German civil population was being restrained.

German administrative machine” and a “lack of coordination among these bits of the mechanism.” The contradiction in his mind was that sharp specialization and thorough coordination were purportedly the cornerstones of the German reputation for organization and efficiency.<sup>563</sup>

Working directly with the Germans had a marked influence on American delegates during the war in Belgium. For Kellogg the experience signified a conversion of an idealistic group of young, open-minded Americans with fairly neutral attitudes into a band of convinced men who after forced retirement from the country in April 1917 devoted their efforts to annihilating the German machine or rescuing and restoring its victims. After two-and-a-half years of silent devotion these men could take no more. During their tenure in Belgium the work of the Americans meant so much to the civil population because according to Kellogg they represented the sympathy of a great nation far away. Cut off from the rest of the world and in many respects from each other the commission exemplified the freedom that still existed somewhere and the hope that freedom would return again. In retrospect, T.B. Kittredge also marveled at the uniqueness of their position. No group of young men from a foreign land had ever before enjoyed such an elevated status as representatives interposed between the hated military rulers of Belgium and the civil population. In a sense the members of the commission were the representatives of the outside world accepted by the Germans to supervise the execution of a solemn promise that Belgians would never starve. Through thought and deed the CRB endeavored to keep its word. “Possessing little actual power,” Kittredge exclaimed, “we yet wielded an enormous influence.”<sup>564</sup>

<sup>563</sup> Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 2:413. Kellogg, *Headquarter Nights*, p. 86. Loc cit, p. 87-88. Loc cit, p. 88.

<sup>564</sup> Kellogg, *Headquarter Nights*, p. 84. Loc cit, p. 52. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 4:159.

## POST SCRIPT/CONCLUSION

### The CRB (1916-November 1918)

Allied forces provided additional obstacles to relief efforts in 1915 and 1916 through the refusal of letting greater amounts of food through the blockade. In December, Hoover pressured the British to allow an increase from 80,000 tons per month to 126,400 in order to maintain an average daily ration of 1800 calories per person. While sympathetic to the efforts of Hoover and the CRB, the British Foreign Office under the pressure of militarists in England and France instead reduced the allowed tonnage of food by 30,000 per month. Throughout 1916, the commission worked to secure a greater flow of foodstuffs. Shipments of food and efforts to provide relief were proving generally effective until the harvest of 1916. The problem in this case involved a disputed compensation claim made by the CRB for German food usage in Belgium. In the face of vehement opposition the CRB adjusted its estimates to avoid further conflict.<sup>565</sup>

Problems of numerous varieties notwithstanding, CRB shipments of relief improved from 983,808 tons in 1915 to 1,278,946 in 1916. Despite the tremendous efforts made by the committee, Hoover reported that many sacrifices had already made and much work to still be done: "Cold statistics do not express the suffering of people or their anxieties for their future. Nor do they acclaim those who died on sea or land for the millions who were saved." By the end of 1916 efforts to prevent German requisitioning saved an estimated 600,000 tons of food. Although difficult to master, improved logistics contributed to an increase in CRB shipping tonnage. On June 1, 1916, 31,342 tons of foodstuffs arrived in a single day. Once in Europe these supplies were loaded on canal boats that handled about 350 tons each. On October 16,

<sup>565</sup> Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 1:179. Loc cit, p. 1:186. In the fall of 1916, the dispute centered along the CRB officials claim that abandoned farms used by the Germans were part of the programs surplus food figures and were therefore subject to committee remuneration. German officials disagreed with the estimated crop surplus.

19,557 tons of foodstuffs were transported to Belgium via a fleet of nearly sixty canal boats in a single day. The year was not without its losses in the process of relief however. Between November 1915 and November 1916, eight CRB vessels were lost to torpedoes and mines, taking an estimated 44,000 tons of food with them. Despite the losses, “no one died of starvation during the year—and the children were fully cared for.”<sup>566</sup>

A decrease in shipping tonnage in 1917 to 767,895 was attributable to several different factors that were not unique to the situation. Through the course of the year eighteen ships were lost to submarines, mines, and other various reasons, causing the loss of 229,500 tons of food en route to Belgium. Despite the reduction in shipping, the CRB saved 302,503 tons of food from German requisitioning and managed to keep an average caloric intake per person at 1522 per day. During the first four years of operation the CRB incrementally enacted a measure of efficiency and economy that reduced overhead expenses to less than three quarters of one percent. Operating in dangerous seas under their own special flag and markings the CRB lost only eighteen shiploads of cargo destined for Belgium through July 1, 1917. Over the same period 484 overseas vessels and 1,008 cross-channel cargoes had been unloaded in Rotterdam by the CRB before 7,084 canal-boats dispatched the supplies to Belgium and Northern France.<sup>567</sup>

The year 1917 marked a turning point in the war through the declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare by the Germans. Knowing that such actions would most likely draw the US into the conflict, the Germany high stakes gamble hoped to end the war before America could make the critical difference. For the CRB, unrestricted submarine warfare crippled shipping efforts. On January 31, all shipments of relief were postponed indefinitely until guarantees could

<sup>566</sup> Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 1:164 and Loc cit, p. 1:267-268. Loc cit, p. 1:164. Loc cit, p. 1:267-268.

Kellogg, *Fighting Starvation in Belgium*, p. 121. Depending on the final port of destination, CRB supplies carried on canal boats traveled between 88 and 235 miles. Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 1:267-268.

<sup>567</sup> Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 1:345-347. Kellogg, *Fighting Starvation in Belgium*, p. 120. Loc cit, p. 115. Loc cit, p. 120.

be secured with the Germans. Although the CRB reached an agreement with Germany on February 9, the sinking of relief ships continued, causing a total loss of 200,000 tons of food. Normal shipments did not resume until February 24, and even then the risks were still great. In the spring and summer of 1917, German unrestricted submarine warfare reached its deadliest intensity. According to Hoover, matters were complicated because the CRB's little fleet (mostly ships requisitioned and donated by the exiled Belgian government) were too small to carry even half of the supplies needed per month. The only alternative was to again charter neutral vessels at a greater expense. "The CRB tried frantically to compensate by drawing upon its reserves and by increasing food purchases in nearby Holland," Hoover reported, "It was not enough." He added that, "because of torpedoing, CRB transports were almost paralyzed."<sup>568</sup>

Decreases in shipping due to unrestricted submarine warfare combined with low agricultural yields to severely cripple to effectiveness of the CRB in 1917 and 1918. By mid-1917 the surplus of American crops was exhausted while a drought threatened harvest yields. Domestic yields in Belgium and France also suffered. In late October the CRB called for the import from overseas of a minimum of about 130,000 tons per month in an attempt to make up the balance. As the US prepared to enter the conflict the CRB faced another shipping crisis. To manage combined efforts the Allies and the US created an Inter-Allied Chartering Executive to handle neutral cargoes. This board according to Hoover took a "dim view of our independent shipping arrangements with neutrals." At this critical juncture in the war, President Wilson agreed that relief came second to military demands. Massive German offensives on the Western Front from March to July 1918 meant an increased concentration of troop transport and materiel on American ships en route to Europe. Allied and American emphasis on military needs in

<sup>568</sup> Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 1:271. Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 3:445-446. Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 1:329.

shipping meant that only 408,000 tons of food reached Rotterdam between November 1917 and March 1918—267,000 short of the minimum that the Allies had sanctioned.<sup>569</sup>

As the war in Europe began to climax CRB food deliveries faltered, bringing with it dire consequences. On March 15, relief officials reduced daily bread rations by nearly 25 percent. Eight days later, the London office of the CRB confessed that it had “miserably failed” to meet its import quotas for five months, thanks to the Allies failure to grant it priority in food and ships. Hoover appealed personally to President Wilson in an attempt to influence Allied shipping policy. On April 8, 1918 he reported to Wilson that the CRB fleet was only able to transport an average of under 60,000 tons of food per month presently. This was about half of what the committee considered as the minimum of which the population could be maintained on.<sup>570</sup>

Unable to sway President Wilson, Hoover took his case directly to British Prime Minister Lloyd George a month later. In their meeting he asked George (who had supported the CRB in the past) to issue the appropriate orders and convey his approval of “necessary diversions” to President Wilson. Direct intervention on the part of the Prime Minister proved to be unnecessary. On May 22, 1918, Wilson assented to the request after the British allocated four ships to relief operations. “A ghastly situation in Belgium” had been averted; Hoover told W.B. Poland, “one of the most difficult crises” ever endured by the CRB was over—and in the nick of time.<sup>571</sup>

With shipping tonnages devoted to relief on the increase, Hoover focused on other issues critical to the survival of Belgium. In June 1918, a cable to Wilson explained a series of issues that the Allies and America had to work out in order to assist the starving populations of Europe.

<sup>569</sup> Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 1:329. Loc cit, p. 1:357-358. Loc cit, p. 1:364. Loc cit, p. 1:373. Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 3:454.

<sup>570</sup> Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 3:454. O'Brien, *The Hoover-Wilson Wartime Correspondence*, p. 184.

<sup>571</sup> Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 3:460. Loc cit, p. 3:460-461. Loc cit, p. 3:461.



Topping Hoover's list of demands was the need for an arrangement of a cereal program for 1919 based upon the real need of the Allies. Organization was a key concern for the head of the CRB, especially in regards to the handling of cereals, meats, fats, sugar, vegetable oils, and fiber. Public image was another component of relief administration that Hoover found to be of absolute importance. On June 13, Hoover told Wilson that, "I believe it will have a considerable effect on the psychology of American production and consumption if we can present to the American people a definite statement that our food supplies must be pooled with Allies' and set out to them a definite program we must fulfill and to be able to state to them accurately what this program is."<sup>572</sup>

Participation by the United States in World War I changed the nature of American relief in Belgium for Hoover and other fellow committee members. From the spring of 1917 to the end of the war Hoover simultaneously chaired the US Food Administration and the CRB. Until April 1917 the CRB was staffed almost exclusively by American volunteers. Once neutrality was broken the American contingent serving in Belgium withdrew from the commission and were replaced by Spanish and Dutch representatives. The US entrance in the war also changed the financial character of the CRB. Until the spring of 1917 the committee received 90 percent of its funding from the British and French governments with the rest coming from charitable contributions. After months of behind the scenes work by Hoover, the US government announced on May 9, 1917 that it would take over the financial responsibility for relief over the next six months.<sup>573</sup>

<sup>572</sup> O'Brien, *The Hoover-Wilson Wartime Correspondence*, p. 204-205.

<sup>573</sup> Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 3:444. Most of American members of the CRB staff joined the US army. Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 3:7. Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 3:445. \$120,000,000 in charitable contributions to the CRB came from the US.

CRB shipments of ravitaillement continued to reach Belgium and Northern France despite the increased complexities of American involvement in the war. On July 11, 1918, Hoover reported to President Wilson that during the 1917-1918 fiscal year the value of CRB food shipments totaled \$1,400,000,000. For all the problems encountered over the past twelve months (including unrestricted submarine warfare by the Germans and the complicated policies of the Inter-Allied Chartering Executive), CRB shipments of meat had increased by 844,600,000 pounds and cereals by an additional 80,900,000 over those in 1916 and 1917. October 1918 was an important time in the war, not only because it marked the coming of the armistice, but also because it marked the yearly high in CRB shipping with 151,889 tons of food reaching Belgium. In 1918, thirteen committee ships had been lost en route. “(As) bad as the situation was for the six months from January to June (1918),” Hoover reported, “there was little death from starvation, and the 2,500,000 children in our canteens were fully cared for.” Shortly before the armistice, Hoover cabled Wilson with his projections for food exports in 1919. In his report he projected an increase in relief shipping to Belgium by 5,730,000 tons to a total of 17,500,000.<sup>574</sup>

The work of the CRB did not end with the signing of an armistice. Immediately after the fighting stopped many former committee members returned to Northern France. In addition, Hoover secured a crew of approximately 150 naval officers-sailors and a vast amount of building materials to build temporary relief shelters. Almost overnight these men erected barracks along roadsides and fitted them with beds and kitchens. The continued avoidance of famine in Belgium required a continued flow of food into the country. On October 18, Hoover reported to Wilson that there was an immediate need for 500,000 tons of shipping to Belgium. In addition, Hoover recommended that Allied governmental aid increase from the current \$15,000,000 to

<sup>574</sup> O’Brien, *The Hoover-Wilson Wartime Correspondence*, p. 229-230. Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 1:377-379. Five ships had been torpedoed, four sunk or damaged by mines, and four were lost due to unknown causes. O’Brien, *The Hoover-Wilson Wartime Correspondence*, p. 265.

over \$30,000,000 per month. Justifying his request, Hoover explained to Wilson that, “with these resources over twelve to eighteen months I believe the people could be made self-supporting.” Although the shelling had stopped and submarine attacks had subsided, the available amount of food for relief was insufficient. Hoover reported to Wilson on November 4 that, “there is a deficiency below what we consider is desirable to preserve health and tranquility.”<sup>575</sup>

### **The CRB in the Armistice Period (1918-1919)**

With the conflict over the future of the CRB was in doubt. Considering the lingering problems of food relief in Belgium, Hoover pressed for the extension of the commission into 1919. According to Hoover, “The large experience of the CRB, the character of its organization without profit, its established use of shipping, and the sympathetic bond which it now forms with the Belgian people point to its continuation and enlargement as the natural agency for this purpose.” In strengthening the CRB, Hoover proposed that the US government offer \$200,000,000 in aid to Belgium under the direct administration of the committee. On November 28, 1918 Hoover proposed that the Belgian government should appoint a representative to each position in the CRB and that the country should become part of the new organization for the Relief and Reconstruction of Europe that would purchase, transport, and finance the costs of their supplies. Belgium resisted this proposal, urging that they needed the continuation and protection of the CRB to prevent being crowded out by other nations seeking post war assistance. In lieu of this request the committee agreed to continue relief temporarily.<sup>576</sup>

<sup>575</sup> Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 3:8-9. O’Brien, *The Hoover-Wilson Wartime Correspondence*, p. 273-274. Loc cit, p. 281.

<sup>576</sup> O’Brien, *The Hoover-Wilson Wartime Correspondence*, p. 285. Loc cit, p. 288. Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 1:394.

The CRB faced a final crisis in May 1919 with the proposal by the Treasury Department to withdraw relief credit from Belgium. Hoover warned the U.S. government that under the provisions of its proposal the Belgians would be out of food in sixty days. With the retirement of the CRB forthcoming on July 1, Hoover pleaded with the government to allow the time necessary for post-committee planning to take effect. In addition to arranging a reduction of monthly aid for Belgian food programs from \$20,000,000 to \$15,000,000 per month, Hoover also sold capital stock to the Germans with the intention of reinvesting the realized sums in foodstuffs. Hoover's final CRB demand was that the U.S. Treasury extend relief credit to Belgium until their food supply was taken care of.<sup>577</sup>

In four and a half years of operation, Hoover estimated that the CRB shipped over 56,000,000 tons of supplies. Extended over a nine-year period of relief spanning both the conflict itself and the aftermath he estimated that the total value of assistance topped \$8,000,000,000. Of these totals, American contributions played a crucial role in the relief of Belgium and Northern France. Loans by the U.S. government and the giving of over 211 charitable institutions accounted for more than \$7,450,000,000 in assistance. Through the direct work of CRB and its army of volunteers across the globe an estimated 20 million lives had been saved.<sup>578</sup>

Herbert Hoover's relief work in Europe did not finish with the dissolution of the CRB. As a personal attendant of the Paris peace negotiations, Hoover saw first hand the political difficulties that plagued the proceedings. From the beginning it appeared that British and French interests in particular blunted the ability of the conference to reach a lasting peace. In Paris, Hoover reported, "Destructive forces sat at the peace table. The genes of a thousand years of

<sup>577</sup> O'Brien, Francis William (Ed.). *Two Peacemakers in Paris: The Hoover-Wilson Post-Armistice Letters, 1918-1920*. (College Station, TX and London: Texas A&M University Press, 1978), p. 146-147.

<sup>578</sup> Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 3:526 and 528.

inbred hate and fear were in the blood of every delegation. These emotions of hate, revenge, desire for reparations, and a righteous sense of wrong were in fever heat with their peoples at home.”<sup>579</sup>

The seeking of retribution clouded both long-term and immediate implications of post war peace. Although the shooting had stopped, in many cases the problems for Europe were just beginning. Among them was an issue that Hoover considered of far greater importance. While European leaders squabbled over the terms of peace, the continent struggled with the greatest famine since the Thirty Year’s War. Power politics based on personal interests fragmented the process of reaching any meaningful agreement. To Hoover the combating of hunger was an issue demanding immediate attention because without it Europe could not be expected to recover in a generation or create the social stability necessary to maintain a lasting peace.<sup>580</sup>

Shortly arriving in Paris, Hoover began pressing for the elimination of the Allied blockade of neutral and enemy nations. To Hoover the issue of hunger demanded immediate attention because without food Europe could expect to recover. While the Germans in a manner of speaking had been his enemy throughout the war, Hoover found the blockade to be at odds with his personal humanitarian beliefs. “I do not believe in the food blockade,” Hoover explained in retrospect, “I do not believe in starving women and children. And above all, I did not believe that stunted bodies and deformed minds in the next generation were secure foundations upon which to rebuild civilization.” Meanwhile, the Lodge Amendment prevented the use of any Congressional appropriation for relief in former enemy countries. Hoover’s plan

<sup>579</sup> Lochner, *Herbert Hoover and Germany*, p. 33.

<sup>580</sup> Lochner, *Herbert Hoover and Germany*, p. 31-32.

to institute a CRB modeled canteen system in Germany for the rehabilitation of children was seen as a virtual impossibility.<sup>581</sup>

The Allied blockade of Germany designed to drive the nation to signing a peace agreement was disastrously successful as negotiations continued into the spring of 1919. At this critical juncture many observers feared that the situation in Germany fostered a sense of hopelessness among the population that could devolve into a state of Communism or anarchy. In a secret report made to the British Embassy about the status of Germany in early 1919 found two types of peoples in the nation: those who are afraid of Communism or those who are converted to Communism either as an inevitable evil or as a possible solution. In February of 1919, Alonzo Taylor observed similar startling scenes: “The entire industrial population...is much below weight; and emaciation has proceeded to the point of lassitude and apathy, against which even the willing worker is hardly able to successfully contend.” Taylor was equally concerned with the rampant nature of crime ravaging the country.<sup>582</sup>

Reports of the horrendous conditions in Germany had little effect on the Allies decision to continue the armistice blockade. In early March 1919, Hoover proposed a plan allowing Germany to purchase food from Allied sources. The French government blocked the initiative. On March 5, a frustrated and concerned Hoover made a cursory report of his progress: “French (are) still blocking food deliveries to Germany. Situation is alarming. Cables all show state of revolution. Americans in Germany (are) being attacked. My opinion, we are living on top of a volcano.”

Less than three weeks later on March 21, Hoover rationally explained why American-based relief organizations were feeding Germany from four different points of view. “From the

<sup>581</sup> Lochner, *Herbert Hoover and Germany*, p. 32. Loc cit, p. 31-32. Loc cit, p. 32.

<sup>582</sup> Lochner, *Herbert Hoover and Germany*, p. 39.

point of an economist,” he related,” it is because there are seventy million people who must either produce or die...” From an administrative perspective, Hoover reported that, “it is because famine breeds anarchy, anarchy is infectious, the infection of such a cesspool will jeopardize France and Britain, and will yet spread to the United States.” As a representative of peace, Hoover explained that maintaining order and stability in Germany was crucial because without it there will be no one to sign peace with. From a Reconstructionist position, Hoover argued that unless Germany was fed the nation could not resume industrial production. Creating a casual link between food, productivity, and general well being, he argued that without the resumption of manufacturing in Germany the economy would remain crippled and unable to maintain order, governmental stability, or repay the damages it owed the world.<sup>583</sup>

In April the British requested that Hoover increase the volume of food to the Germans. Later that month Lord Robert Cecil urged the Supreme Economic Council to take steps that would foster the resumption of normal trade with Germany and other European countries as soon as possible. On May 14, Hoover cabled President Wilson with a final warning concerning the future of Germany without Allied relief. “The margins on which the German people must live (on) from now until the harvest are so small,” Hoover reported, “that any cessation of the stream of food, even for a short time, will bring the most wholesale loss of life.” Without assistance, Hoover predicted that military occupation would be necessary in order to save Europe.<sup>584</sup>

Allied restrictions on Germany ended with the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles on July 9, 1919. As relief began reaching the beleaguered nation it appeared that permanent political damage had accompanied personal privation. “The delay of food supplies (over the) four months following the armistice promise was not only immoral, but inhumane, (and) it

<sup>583</sup> Lochner, *Herbert Hoover and Germany*, p. 38. Loc cit, p. 42.

<sup>584</sup> Lochner, *Herbert Hoover and Germany*, p. 44-45. The process of relief proposed by the British was slowed by the delaying actions of the French. Loc cit, p. 45.

sowed (the) dragon's teeth for another war," Hoover recalled years later, "It made it doubtful that Germany could be saved from Communism." Although more than 1,215,216 tons of food valued at \$282,421,665 were delivered during the armistice, the food outlook in Germany after Versailles was grim.<sup>585</sup>

The Brussels Agreement created in March of 1919 allowed Germany to purchase food supplies under specific restrictions before the final lifting of the Allied blockade. Once in place, Hoover was charged with finding, buying, and shipping 1,800,000 tons of food to Germany. Upon receiving authorization, he released a vast stock of food stored at Brussels, Rotterdam, and Antwerp without receiving initial payment. In total the entire food reserve of the CRB was diverted to the Germans. Hoover reported that the impact was immediate and immense: "Our hundreds of thousands of tons stored in ports poured like manna over all (of) Germany." The speed of reaction by the Americans astonished even the German press who interpreted the relief of the nation without payment as a mark of confidence in the newly formed Ebert government. After the blockade was lifted the American Friends Service Committee, staffed by Quakers, handled the relief of Germany. Hoover recognized that the "Friends" provided an invaluable service by organizing and operating canteens and dispensing \$6,728,989 in assistance. The newly formed American Relief Administration (ARA) provided additional relief to the Germans. Under the leadership of Hoover the organization provided \$34,271,649 in aid to Germany.<sup>586</sup>

Shortly after the armistice it became evident that a major international food problem was eminent in 1919. In an attempt to combat hunger the Allies and the US in early January 1919 established the Supreme Council of Supply and Relief to deal with questions of food, finance and the shipping of resources in relation to the transportation of food supplies to struggling nations.

<sup>585</sup> Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 3:85. Loc cit, p. 3:333.

<sup>586</sup> Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 3:86. Loc cit, p. 3:87. Loc cit, p. 3:334-335. The Friends withdrew from Germany in July of 1922, believing that their services were need more in Russia. Loc cit, p. 3:335. Loc cit, p. 3:340.



Headed by Hoover and staffed by representatives from France, Britain, and Italy, the council estimated that \$400,000,000 in relief was required to ration starving peoples for the rest of the winter. At the same time Hoover had a strategy in mind for an American based relief initiative. On January 25, Hoover wrote to Wilson with the details of a proposed U.S. Relief Administration. With a previously secured funding base of \$105,000,000, the administration would coordinate the distribution of foodstuffs required by any country. To maintain autonomy, Hoover demanded that the program not be placed under the control of the Allied Supreme Council of Supply and Relief. A day earlier on January 24, the Congress passed the European Famine Relief Bill with a budget of \$100,000,000 earmarked for direct European assistance. On February 24, Wilson drafted the executive order establishing the ARA.<sup>587</sup>

Working as a logical progression from previously organized initiatives of relief (including the CRB), the ARA inherited warehouses that its predecessors had established throughout Europe. The process of supplying food to Europe through the ARA was unique from previous efforts managed by Hoover. In the process of relief the administration sold food drafts to individuals through American banks in denominations of ten to fifty dollars that could then be sent by the purchaser to friends in Europe where the food could be obtained from ARA warehouses. Under ARA administration a total of \$24,302,916 in food drafts were sold to Europe. Beyond the sale of provisions, the ARA held a series of public dinners under the title “The Invisible Guest.” The most successful was a New York benefit that in addition to selling 1000 tickets at \$1000 each also raised over \$1,000,000 in pledges. When the pledge total was

<sup>587</sup> No author listed. “V. The International Food Problem.” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 3, Supplement. (Sept, 1919), p. 71. O’Brien, *Two Peacemakers in Paris*, p. 50-51. V. *The International Food Problem*, p. 71.

announced for the dinner American oil magnate John D. Rockefeller, Jr. announced that he would bring the total up to \$3,300,000.<sup>588</sup>

Similar to his experiences with the CRB, securing stable funding for the ARA was a constant challenge for Herbert Hoover. The signing of the Versailles Treaty marked a shift in American foreign policy towards Europe that had an immediate impact on the ARA. Under Congressional directive on either July 1, 1919 or upon the signing of the Versailles Treaty the authority of the US Treasury to make loans to Europe under the European Famine Relief Bill would come to an end. The sudden privatization of the administration threatened the 17,585 tons of supplies en route to Europe. For many the post-war work of providing food relief in Europe was just beginning. On July 1, Hoover reported that although the ARA had received request for aid to 2,500,000 children along with an additional 3,950,000 expectant mothers and orphans in relief canteens that demanded continued attention. Advisors to President Wilson echoed concerns over the stability of Europe and its potential spillover into the United States. If stability initiatives failed, Wilson's chief economic advisors feared in May 1919 that a serious business and industrial depression would result in America fomenting industrial and political revolutions.<sup>589</sup>

Beyond the prospects of relief Hoover was deeply concerned with the financial capabilities of Germany and Austria to rebuild after the peace. In a press statement released on June 7, Hoover questioned how they would be able to pay indemnity and at the same time secure credit for raw materials and food imports under a commission whose duty it is to secure maximum reparations. Food combined with credit to purchase goods overseas was the solution

<sup>588</sup> Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 3:250. Loc cit, p. 3:256-257. Hoover himself often spoke at such benefits raising money for the ARA.

<sup>589</sup> Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 3:236. Loc cit, p. 3:249. Loc cit, p. 3:242. Hogan, *The U.S. and the problem of International Economic Control*, p. 99-100.

to European restructuring. According to Hoover if such finances could be provided, Europe should be self-supporting within a year. Without credit and food relief the guarantees of basic rights and freedoms in Europe were at risk. In a memorandum sent to Wilson on July 3, Hoover reported that the problem of social ferment and class-consciousness was the most difficult to solve. Because of the suffering already faced throughout much of Europe the tumult of Socialism and Communism, “has embraced to itself the claim to speak for all the downtrodden, to alone bespeak human sympathy and to alone present remedies...”<sup>590</sup>

Although Congressional funding ended with the peace, the grain corporation created under the wartime US Food Administration was extended to Europe and placed under the control of the ARA to discharge its surplus of American foodstuffs. From the sale of provisions the corporation generated \$226,384,291 in excess profits. Of that amount, \$57,782,118 was applied to Europe while another \$18,662,180 was dedicated to Russian relief. Over four years the ARA offered the populations of Europe foodstuffs in four different packages containing flour, beans, milk, and a fourth item (bacon, cottonseed oil, or corned beef) valued at either \$10 or \$50. When sales halted in June of 1923 to value of food supplied to Europe totaled \$24,302,916. From that amount \$14,417,510 went to Russian relief.<sup>591</sup>

Despite the efforts of the ARA, the international food problem continued into the 1920s. Nevertheless, in 1920 it was reported that famine conditions due to underproduction and a lack of adequate transportation facilities were greatly ameliorated. Beyond the ARA and the U.S. grain corporation, the American Red Cross announced in 1920 that it had set aside a fund of \$30,000,000 for European and Russian relief. Funding and relief totals still fell below what was necessary to assist Europe however. On January 7, Hoover declared that outside of a few dozen

<sup>590</sup> O'Brien, *Two Peacemakers in Paris*, p. 159. Loc cit, p. 199.

<sup>591</sup> Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 3:261. Loc cit, p. 3:254. Loc cit, p. 3:255.

cities in Central and Southern Europe the continent could not feed itself. In a January 12 appearance before the House Ways and Means Committee, Hoover reported that although the United States was spending \$7,000,000 per month to feed 3,00,000 children in impoverished Europe the relief was not enough. In supporting Treasury Secretary Glass' recommendation of a \$150,000,000 appropriation for Europe, Hoover predicted that the granting of such aid to starving cities in Central Europe would "build up security for its \$10,000,000,000 (loaned) abroad." Assistance provided by the ARA in 1920 increasingly spread to Eastern Europe and Russia. In battling typhus, famine, and other problems in Russia the ARA committed a total of over \$1,000,000,000 between 1921 and 1923. During this period Hoover even went as far as selling a percentage of the 1922 American wheat crop to the Bolsheviks, a group whom he would not deal with under any other circumstances.<sup>592</sup>

From an original plan in the summer of 1919 to provide relief to children in twelve countries the ARA quickly expanded its efforts. Under Hoover the administration distributed 19,000,000 tons of food, clothing, and other supplies valued at \$3,500,000,000 between 1919 and 1923. Public support for both the CRB and the ARA were critical to their successes. During its existence, 47 institutions contributed \$29,556,071.90 to the ARA. Combining charity with volunteer work of many varieties the administration estimated that approximately 7,000,000 individuals contributed to the effort.<sup>593</sup>

### **The Contributions of Herbert Hoover**

World War I had a devastating effect on the European continent. In what was then thought to be the defining moment of the century, 33 countries mobilized 70 million men in the

<sup>592</sup> No author listed. "IV. The International Food Problem." *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 3, Supplement. (Sept. 1920): 19-20, p. 19. Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 3:250-252. Hawley, Ellis W. (Ed.). *Herbert Hoover as Secretary of Commerce*. (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1974), p. 133.

<sup>593</sup> Wilson, Joan Hoff. *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*. (Little, Brown, and Company (Boston and Toronto), 1975), 46. Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 3:257-258.

Great War. In the 1,564 days of conflict, 20 million were wounded with another 15 million disabled. Beyond combatant deaths an additional 20 million civilians died in World War I. Thanks in large part to CRB relief efforts the death rate as a percentage of the total population in Belgium totaled 0.5 percent. Applying his personal beliefs in cooperation to the task of relief, Herbert Hoover set precedence for his future work in government as chairman of the commission. In Belgian relief, Hoover demonstrated his partiality for volunteer professionals like himself and through his administrative efforts proved his ability to recruit, organize, and retain these experts in promoting a common goal.<sup>594</sup>

Efficient management of critical resources in a multitude of dangerous environments framed Hoover's abilities to perform under pressure and adapt to circumstances. To the Belgian, French, British, and US governments whom directly funded relief and the millions of individuals who made private contributions, the CRB was answerable for the honest and efficient use of the resources at its disposal. In total the committee managed resources valued at nearly one billion dollars, a sum equivalent to the net debt of the United States in the years prior to World War I. Bold actions and quick decision making directly contributed to the success of the CRB. As the director of the committee, Hoover made executive decisions that at times risked his own personal safety. An official of the British Foreign Office once described the CRB as a "piratical state organization for benevolence." While operating as a private entity, the committee performed functions and enjoyed prerogatives that were usually reserved for official state bodies. The CRB itself was a neutral entity flying under its own colors and operated under its own fleet between

<sup>594</sup> Broadberry, Stephen and Harrison, Mark (Ed.). *The Economics of World War I*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 35. Loc cit, p. 27. Cuff, *The Ideology of Voluntarism and War Organization During the Great War*, p. 359.

the opposing lines, but in the pursuit of duties it created frequent controversy for both belligerents.<sup>595</sup>

Hoover understood the importance of his work and strove to make sure that the CRB did not fail. To the people of Belgium and Northern France who had been left defenseless and starving by the war the CRB was a volunteer champion striving with all its power to save the population. While the commission was an international organization its founders and principal directors were American. Hoover and those associated with him in the direction of the committee were private citizens from the United States and in their work looked first to their fellow countrymen for moral and material support. During World War I the American public itself viewed the CRB as an American enterprise.<sup>596</sup>

Hoover's efforts were equally appreciated within the commission itself. In a letter written on February 16, 1916, Horace Fletcher marveled at the CRB's one-percent administrative costs compared to an average of 60 percent for similar philanthropic endeavors. Fletcher commented that in reducing the Belgian death rate to nearly one half of that in New York City the commission was "unparalleled" in the history of philanthropy and was only approached in regards to engineer-efficiency by the recently-completed Panama Canal project. Vernon Kellogg added that much of Hoover's success as a philanthropist was due to his application of engineering methods to the work of relief by procedurally ascertaining facts, determining participants, formulating a strategy, and the mobilizing instant action. According to Kellogg, "Many of us believe that Hoover has pioneered the path to a new form of philanthropic action with something of a new end to be attained. His way involves the application in large relief

<sup>595</sup> Lochner, *Herbert Hoover and Germany*, p. 11. Ibid, 10.

<sup>596</sup> Lochner, *Herbert Hoover and Germany*, p. 11.

measures of the new methods of engineering science (with) the methods of great business administration and executive committee.”<sup>597</sup>

Kellogg also observed that there was much more to the chairman’s work than an engineer attacking a problem. He believed that the political results of Hoover’s work were ancillary to his life saving activities. During the armistice period Hoover fought bitter prejudices in order to feed Germany and Austria. While many considered him “pro-German,” in reality the chairman was in Kellogg’s opinion, “pro-women, children, and the helpless.” Effective government, business organization, and knowledge of economics and sociology were the instrumentalities Hoover believed should be used to advance human service and expand the spiritual life of nations. Kellogg observed that the kind of humanitarian work Hoover did not only saved lives and ameliorated suffering but also created domestic and international good will. Hoover believed that in places where millions were engaged in a common effort to help the less fortunate the result was undoubtedly the advancement of brotherhood and a development of responsibility from one person to another.<sup>598</sup>

Between 1914 and 1919, Hoover assisted in the coordination of relief totaling \$5,234,028,208.56. Under his management the people of Europe received 33,841,307 tons of supplies provided by America mostly. CRB delegate T.B. Kittredge believed that Hoover “did indeed save Belgium; he saved the population from famine by getting them food, he saved their souls from despair by brining to them the ever-present assurance that the world recognized the justice of their cause and that the world would right their wrongs.” The echoes of Hoover’s humanitarian efforts during the war era reverberated throughout the rest of his public career. In

<sup>597</sup> CRB NY Regular Meeting Minutes, Addendum Letter, pp. 1, Friday, February, 25, 1916. Herbert Hoover Presidential Library Archives (microfilm): Commission for Relief in Belgium, New York office committee minutes and agenda, November 1915-November 1918. Kellogg, *Herbert Hoover As His Friends See Him*, p. 7. Loc cit, p. 15. Kellogg added that Hoover’s relief program included components of sound economic and social restoration with immediate needs of charity.

<sup>598</sup> Kellogg, *Herbert Hoover As His Friends See Him*, p. 12. Loc cit, p. 15.

June 1928 the *New York Times* commented that Hoover was “one of the few successful businessmen who turned to politics and government in the prime of his life, introducing methods of business efficiency, standardization and economy into public office, and encountering success in politics comparable with his success in business.” A decade after the CRB retired King Albert promised that “Belgium will never forget the help given by Mr. Hoover to (its) people suffering in the throes of the Great War. He was the soul of (our) relief amidst the greatest political, maritime, and economic difficulties.”<sup>599</sup>

In its achievements the CRB simultaneously demonstrated the value of Hoover’s commitments to voluntarism, cooperation, and individualism. What wartime administrators like Hoover wanted most of all was to have the utmost freedom of flexibility in action. Viewing themselves as representatives of the moral and technically superior expert in public service, administrators believed that they should be trusted with wide-ranging delegated authority. As the head of Belgian relief, the ARA, and the U.S. Food Administration, Hoover projected a romantic view of the professional man, a common cultural theme of the period and a central component of the promise of voluntarism. In this manner it was possible for the character, integrity, social consciousness, and proud individualism of the gentleman to unite with the efficiency and technical virtuosity of the modern manager.<sup>600</sup>

Working under the guise of voluntarism, Hoover sketched his own model of the efficient organization. His personal views on the appropriate forms of administrative leadership reinforced his image as the embodiment of voluntarism. Hoover rejected the structure of military organizations and the modern industrial corporation in favor of an organization based on his private experiences in mining/consulting. In managing relief during World War I, Hoover

<sup>599</sup> Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. ix. Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 4:159. *New York Times*, June 15, 1928, p. 10. *New York Times*, January 20, 1929, p. 2.

<sup>600</sup> Cuff, *The Ideology of Voluntarism and War Organization During the Great War*, p. 371. Loc cit, p. 359.



chose a professional over a bureaucratic form of organization. Throughout his years in public service, Hoover employed this same strategy to other situations, including economic crises encountered as president. Voluntarism was also critical to the placement of private citizens in public positions and for the countering of conflict of interest charges aimed at Hoover and other “dollar per year men” working for American wartime institutions. The structure and management of emergency administration also required justification, and, in keeping with the ideal of voluntarism, Hoover and his staff argued for administrative informality and unified authority against congressmen who demanded detailed statutory prescriptions, strict accountability, and committee-based action.<sup>601</sup>

The structure of voluntarism as a mode of thought reflected in fundamental ways the structure of American mobilization as a unique system of war organization. Hoover’s remarkable war career confirmed the impact of voluntarism in practice. He saw the world, and America in particular as standing at the crossroads of history after World War I—one path leading to higher standards of living through decentralized techno-corporate organization and cooperative individualism; the other leading to socialism, fascism, syndicalism or communism through the dehumanized collective personality that destroyed individual initiative and retarded progress. Writing in 1922, Hoover commented that socialism necessitated a “bureaucracy of the entire population” and destroyed the economic initiative of the citizenry. The CRB and the ARA proved the successes of what Hoover called American individualism—the use of voluntary decentralization for carrying out nationally coordinated programs.<sup>602</sup>

For his efforts, Hoover received resounding praise and thanks from a multitude of sources. On such occasions he was reluctant to receive commendations for his efforts. During

<sup>601</sup> Cuff, *The Ideology of Voluntarism and War Organization During the Great War*, p. 359. Loc cit, p. 362-363.

<sup>602</sup> Cuff, *The Ideology of Voluntarism and War Organization During the Great War*, p. 359. Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*, p. 56-57.

the war, Hoover respectfully refused King Albert of Belgium's proposal to confer him Hoover the highest order of decoration. In Britain, appreciations for the successful coordination of relief were expressed as the conflict pressed on. In April 1917, Lord Eustace Percy of the British Foreign Office wrote to Hoover that "what I have (learned) in these years I have (learned) from my association with you...this is not a subject I can dilate upon—I have not the words." Percy added, "I have watched a great work accomplished by a great American—with a concentration of purpose and a devotion to duty (that) I cannot forget. I hope the years to come will give me some opportunity of showing the respect—and something more—that I feel."<sup>603</sup>

Central power belligerents also expressed gratitude towards the humanitarian efforts of Hoover. In Germany, Hoover was respected for his cunning during the conflict and for his commitment to lifting the Allied blockade preceding the signing of the peace. German authorities were impressed by his astute dealings with authorities and considerable shrewdness in obtaining the maximum amount of food and supplies for the available funds. They also recognized that Hoover knew the markets and the ways of speculators, and he did not hesitate to engage in manipulations to prevent an undue rise in food prices because of the heavy purchases made by the CRB. Moreover, Hoover was praised by the Germans for his organization of food relief to the nation after the armistice. In 1928, Baron von Hunefeld proposed a toast to Hoover, saying, "You, sir, were the first after the war to give food to the German people. It shall never be forgotten in the Fatherland."<sup>604</sup>

By 1920, Hoover enjoyed the reputation of an outstanding "engineer-economist-organizer." The same year his name was mentioned as a viable candidate for the presidency. Through his earlier work in engineering and more recent efforts in the direction of the CRB,

<sup>603</sup> Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 1:443.

<sup>604</sup> Dorfman, *The Economic Mind in American Civilization*, p. 4:25. Lochner, *Herbert Hoover and Germany*, p. 67.

Hoover's career exemplified a combination of self-reliance and practical idealism, of the self-made man and the efficient humanitarian. Most of his presidential campaign support came from journalists and public figures rather than party figures. This factor played a significant role in the Republican nomination of Warren G. Harding over Hoover. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that there was widespread public sentiment in favor of the former chairman of the CRB for president in 1920. Respect and admiration for Hoover crossed partisan boundaries in the early 1920s. Among those to praise his efforts in World War I Europe was Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt. During the mid-1920s, Hoover employed ideals of voluntarism, cooperative capitalism, and individualism to his work as the US Secretary of Commerce. While holding the position he continued to pay specific attention to Europe, especially in regards to economic recovery and stability.<sup>605</sup>

Behind the organizational talent and business-leadership acumen was another side of Hoover that few ever saw. To those that knew him best there was a generous and passionate man behind the cool and sometimes implacable public persona. Privately behind the scenes Hoover dedicated his personal wealth and risked his own fortune to assure the success of the CRB. In 1914, Hoover signed a personal note of indebtedness for \$600,000 to keep the commission going during the early phases of operation. Two years later he was prepared to pledge his entire personal fortune—worth more than a million dollars—as security against any liability to his New York advisory committee. In addition, Hoover paid thousands of dollars out of his own pocket for the living expenses of his CRB staff. Throughout his chairmanship of the commission Hoover made no mention of these personal contributions.<sup>606</sup>

<sup>605</sup> Dorfman, *The Economic Mind in American Civilization*, p. 4:26. Loc cit, p. 4:25.

<sup>606</sup> Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 2:374.

While outwardly appearing as a man of cold logic and unswerving purpose, Hoover was “more than a single-minded, hard-driving executive with a will of iron.” No one who worked with him in those days, Lord Eustace Percy later recalled, could overlook his “emotional humanity” and “personal affectionateness.” At times Hoover’s emotions came through—as in the case when he and Brand Whitlock made their first visit to a Brussels CRB relief station in late 1914. Reportedly the episode was traumatic for Hoover. Particularly among children his unsentimental exterior dissolved quickly.<sup>607</sup>

Hoover’s experience coordinating World War I relief edified his commitment to management through cooperation and voluntarism. “Five years ago Hoover was comparatively unknown,” journalist William C. Edgar wrote in the early 1920s, “today kings and rulers delight to honor him, and nations justly (praise) him as their preserver from hunger...he is the embodiment of the efficient American in achievements, but not only through his genius for organization, his inexhaustible capacity for work, his extraordinary grasp of perplexing and intricate problems and his magnetic leadership of men that he accomplishes wonders.” While serving as the Secretary of Commerce, a complimentary editorial appeared in the September 25, 1925 edition of the *New York Times*, expressing that the story of the CRB “is an illustration of what such a directing mind as that of Herbert Hoover can do when left to work out its plans for human betterment without political interference and when assisted by men and women of such competence and loyalty as surrounded him in this adventure on an earth-scale for relief of the neediest.” In its final remarks the editorial concluded, “Whatever Mr. Hoover may do...he may have the consciousness that he has written the brightest chapter than any one man has written in the history of the war.”<sup>608</sup>

<sup>607</sup> Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 2:372.

<sup>608</sup> Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*, p. 3:503. Loc cit, p. 3:444.

## The CRB in Retrospect

The accomplishments of the CRB after four and a half years of relief were also staggering. “For four years it fed ten million people (and) brought them through without starvation,” Will Irwin concluded about the commission, “It maintained a stream of 350,000,000 pounds of foodstuffs a month. It carried the destitute—eventually about 55 percent of the Belgians and northern French—largely on profits from the affluent.” After the armistice the CRB continued its work for another six months at the request of the Belgian government. During this time Irwin observed that, “the price of all food stuffs (were) so much lower in Belgium (than) in other countries that the authorities feared international jealousy.” In his memoirs, Hoover estimated that under his guidance relief organizations both during and after the war shipped 33,841,307 tons of American food and supplies abroad valued at \$5,234,000,000. On Christmas Eve 1919, French Foreign Minister Briand M. Edmond Labbe expressed his gratitude towards the commission of the nation: “Let us express it once more, fully conscious of the service that the CRB rendered to our populations during the interminable duration of this horrible war. The CRB has given us the means of resisting physiological deterioration, and what is of even greater value, of fighting against the weakening of our morale.”<sup>609</sup>

Observers commented that if the term “benevolent neutrality” had any meaning whatsoever it was never more clearly manifested than in the work of the CRB. Less than a year into operations, Mable Hyde Kittredge recognized that the use of scientific organization as a tool of good will distinguished the commission from other charitable organizations. Many associated with wartime philanthropy marveled at the fact that while in the past public relief on a large scale was commonly associated with extravagance and scandal the CRB was alone synonymous with

<sup>609</sup> Lochner, *Herbert Hoover and Germany*, p. 26. Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*, p. 46. This estimation does not include the coordination of European supplies. Hoover, *An American Epic*, p. 1:441.

economy and efficiency. T.B. Kittredge believed that the efforts of the commission were nothing less than “an absolute miracle of scientific organization.” He added that this was the first time in history that an entire people were fed by a private organization. Statistics notwithstanding, Hoover himself was especially pleased by the fact that 2,500,000 children came out of the war in better health than normal. The *New York Times* agreed that the CRB’s work was monumental. Under the headline *A Noble Achievement*, the paper predicted that the commission was destined to be historic.<sup>610</sup>

After nearly four years of work the results of the commission’s program of imports was impressive. Between 1914 and 1919 the CRB imported 3,896,180 tons of relief supplies to Belgium valued at \$641,056,693.69. During the same period a total of 1,091,879 tons valued at \$220,283,550.52 were imported to Northern France. Combined with an armistice program of 186,372 tons imported into Germany, the grand total of relief shipped by the CRB was 5,174,431 tons valued at \$927,681,485.08.<sup>611</sup>

Throughout its existence the CRB had its share of detractors. T.B. Kittredge recalled in 1920 that many people continued to wonder whether the enormous efforts made by America were necessary. While critics grudgingly admitted that the work was praiseworthy and well done they persisted that it was none of America’s business and that those involved should have left Europe alone to deal with the problem. Kittredge countered that the demographics and the population concentration of Belgium demanded action by outsiders. As a nation that imported over three-fourths of its necessities in exchange for export products the Belgian population was

<sup>610</sup> Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 3. Kittredge, *Taking Care of Belgium*, p. 2. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 4. Kellogg, *Herbert Hoover As His Friends See Him*, p. 9. *New York Times*, July 24, 1921, p. 26.

<sup>611</sup> Surface and Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period*, p. 55. To purchase relief supplies the CRB acquired a basic capital stock of \$759,159,607.19. Loc cit, p. 142. Of that total the various state organizations provided \$6,051,859.82. Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, p. 2:309.

in serious need of assistance.<sup>612</sup>

The experience of the commission's volunteers during the war convinced them that their work was of vital importance. Throughout the Belgians struggle to survive they were perpetually grateful for the commission's work. Edward Eyre Hunt remembered that there was "something almost ritualistic in the reiteration of their gratitude." In his experience they never a nation acted as beggars receiving charity. With heart-filled sincerity Belgians declared, "You have saved our lives. Without you, what would have become of us and our poor Belgium?"<sup>613</sup>

For countless reasons Vernon Kellogg believed that complete story of the CRB would be difficult to tell. While many were aware of the commission's treaties with the Allies and Germany and tremendous efforts made on behalf of its volunteers to collect the charity of the world and secure governmental funding in order to break the steel ring around Belgium with 5,000,000 tons of relief there was much more to the experience. "The details have yet to be told in full," Kellogg concluded, "probably they never will be told." Through this project we now have a better understanding of the Commission for Relief in Belgium.<sup>614</sup>

<sup>612</sup> Kittredge, *Californians with Hoover in Europe*, p. 1:7. Belgium was the world's most densely populated country at the time at nearly 700 people per square mile.

<sup>613</sup> Hunt, *War Bread*, p. 265.

<sup>614</sup> Kellogg, *Herbert Hoover As His Friends See Him*, p. 8. Loc cit, p. 9.

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