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# A HISTORY OF THE C.R.B.

By  
**TRACY B. KITTREDGE**





The History of  
The Commission for Relief in Belgium  
1914-1917

BY  
TRACY B. KITTREDGE

To H. Morse Stephens,  
with the hope that he will find  
this sketch not altogether unworthy  
of his teaching

Tracy B. Kittredge

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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

### THE 'C. R. B.': WHAT IT IS

The Work of the Commission for Relief in Belgium.—The Commission for Relief in Belgium is one of the most singular institutions called into existence by the unusual developments of the present international situation. It yields to none in the dramatic interest of its activities during these four years of war. Born out of the exigencies of the military situation, it was created originally as a temporary gap, or rather valve, in the iron-bound ring of the lines of the belligerents through which food could flow to the population living under German rule in Belgium, and thus save them from the consequences of the Allies' Blockade. Once created, it widened the gap until a hundred thousand tons of food a month was being introduced and the work had become of such a nature that none of the belligerents dared or cared to stop it. It can be likened not only to a valve as far as the blockade was concerned, but also to a shield interposed between the German armies and the people of the occupied territories over whom they ruled. It has not only brought in food from the outside, it has succeeded also in saving to the populations of the occupied territories the greater part of their native food products.

The Commission was organised as a more or less temporary American Relief Committee to aid the suffering and the destitute in Belgium. It came to be a more or less permanent neutral organisation carrying on semi-diplomatic relations with at least seven governments,\* playing the part of a commissary department for more than seven million people in Belgium and more than two million people in Northern France; and acting as the medium for the mobilisation of the charity of the world to prevent famine and its inevitable consequences from decimating these populations already so sorely tried by the unhappy calamities the war had brought upon them. The Commission became in a sense the only remaining voice of the spirit of international solidarity in a world rent asunder by cries of hate and the clash of arms. It has directed the world's attention to the condition of the population of Belgium, and mobilised public opinion to save that population by insisting on the continuance of the flow of food supplies and by acting as a restraint on the occupying forces. It centred the attention and interest, not only of neutrals but of the more generous spirited and liberal elements in all the belligerent countries, including Germany, on what was happening in Belgium and Northern France. By its efforts it has been able through four terrible years of war to keep from an otherwise inevitable starvation 9,500,000 people. It has become the greatest and probably the most efficient charitable enterprise the world has ever known. It is certainly the most unique.

Characteristics of the Commission's Organisation.—The Americans, who in October 1914, undertook to buy and ship to Belgium a limited quantity of food with the limited funds entrusted to them, had in the beginning but little notion of what was before them. If they had known they might not have volunteered so willingly. At that

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\* Germany, England, France, Belgium, The United States, Holland, and Spain.

time few people believed it possible that the war could last more than a few months. When the Commission for Relief in Belgium was organised, the idea prevailed that once the winter was over, its work would come to an end. But as month passed into month, the end seemed ever farther away. As time passed without changing materially the lines on the war maps, the directors of the Commission found that their organisation was becoming continually more indispensable to the populations they had volunteered to serve. So the work still goes on.

The character of the Commission's organisation reflects the state of chronic uncertainty that always prevailed about the duration of its work. Originating as it did, modifying its program to meet the kaleidoscopic changes in the military and diplomatic situation, it never developed any permanent organisation. In the first thirty months of its activity the Commission expended \$300,000,000, and bought and shipped into Belgium 2,600,000 tons of food. Yet to this day the Commission, as an organisation, can neither sue nor be sued in any law court of the world: it has no legal existence. A motto over the mantelpiece in the luncheon room of the Commission's London office happily catches the idea on which its organisation was based: 'This cannot go on for ever.' It was never intended to be anything but a temporary expedient to take care of a novel situation. It had set about to do a particular job; as long as there was need for it, it had to go on, so it gradually became an institution, but an institution of unique character. Thomas Carlyle once declared that institutions were but the lengthened shadows of great men. So with the Commission. From the first it has been directed and shaped by the self-sacrificing devotion, indomitable will, practical wisdom, business efficiency and straightforward diplomatic skill of its organiser, Herbert Clark Hoover, of whom much more will be said in these pages. It is in no sense, however, a one-man organisation. As Hoover himself often said, the value of any organiser's efforts depends ultimately on the extent to which he can develop a great and going institution to carry on the work on hand. The Commission for Relief in Belgium became such an institution, representing the skilful and devoted work of many hands in the varied aspects of its activity, in its financial, food purchase and shipping arrangements, and in its machinery for the control and distribution of the food sent into Belgium and Northern France.

The part played by Americans.—Called into being as an American organisation to 'carry into execution the engagements undertaken by the American Envoys in London and Brussels with regard to provisioning the people of Belgium,'\* it soon was transformed into an international neutral organisation under the patronage of American and Spanish, and, later on, of Dutch diplomatic representatives. Its directing heads were from first to last, however, Americans; its methods were those of American business; and, to a very great extent, it remained in spirit and in fact, if not in form, an American enterprise.

The Commission and its Neutrality.—In form and essence there was never a more neutral body. No group of men ever struggled more desperately to remain neutral in their official acts than the men who took part in the work of the Commission for Relief in Belgium. The peculiar position of the Commission as a buffer between the two groups of belligerents made it all important that an absolute neutrality be observed, except in so far as the interests of the population in Belgium and Northern France were concerned.

The Commission sought to aid these people, who had suffered so heavily in the war

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\* This was the purpose of the Commission as stated in the minutes of the meeting of October 22, 1914.

and who suffered no less heavily from the daily contact with their temporary rulers, in every possible way and by all means in its possession. What Hoover wrote not long ago of his own activities applies equally well to all the many men who served under him: 'My position as Chairman of the neutral Commission meant that I was chiefly engaged in negotiating with the German authorities with a view to getting better conditions for the hardly pressed Belgian people.'\*

The Commission has succeeded for nearly four years in carrying on its self-imposed task in such a way as to win and maintain the respect and confidence of all the governments concerned, belligerents as well as neutrals. The greatest compliment that could have been paid to the American members of the Commission for their success in carrying on as neutrals their most difficult work was the invitation, extended in February last, to the chief representatives of the Commission then in Brussels, by the German authorities, to remain in Belgium to continue the direction of the relief work even in the event of war between the United States and Germany. One of these representatives, the assistant director, did in fact direct the work for three weeks after the declaration of war by Congress, and during that time was accorded the same privileges he had formerly enjoyed, including the permission to travel about Belgium in his motor-car, unaccompanied, and to go to Holland on the business of the Commission. If the term 'benevolent neutrality' has any meaning whatsoever, it has never been more clearly manifested than in the work of the Commission for Relief in Belgium.

In spite of the importance of the work of the Commission, and the amount of publicity it has enjoyed, the world at large has still but a faint conception of what it really was, and is. In Belgium and in America there is a very current impression that all the funds expended by the Commission were derived from American gifts. In truth only five per cent. of the total disbursements were contributed in the United States or by Americans. Frequently, too, it is believed that the Commission's sole function is that of rendering a kind of first aid to the injured and last comfort to the dying. Its work has been considered as closely akin to that of the Red Cross, including only the care of the sick, the afflicted and the destitute, and the doling out by the personal intervention of its representatives in the field of the charitable offerings of a sympathetic world. Yet, in a sense, this is but a small part of the Commission's work. It distributes not only to the destitute but to the rich as well. It imports many thousands of tons of food each month to be distributed for the most part to people who can afford to pay for their rations, but who otherwise, for all their money, could find none to buy. In March 1917, after two and a half years of war, and of enforced loss of income, well over half of the 9,000,000 people who were on the ration lists of the Commission were paying in cash for their rations.

From this fact comes another misconception which has occasionally been the cause of nasty flings at the Commission by people who misunderstood or wilfully misrepresented its system of distribution and its scheme of operation. It has been said that the Commission was an organisation of Americans formed for the purpose of carrying on an ordinary commercial venture for their own profit. Even the adjutant to the Governor-General of Belgium once turned to Mr. Hoover in the course of a conversation † and suddenly asked: 'Now, tell me, what are you Americans getting out of this work?'

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\* *Land and Water*, June 7, 1917.

† On February 11, 1915.

Some of the representatives of the Commission, volunteers who were giving their time and energy without thought of any compensation, were occasionally addressed, in the early days of the work, by Belgian and French committees as representatives of American commerce, greatly to their own annoyance and indignation.

**Problems of the Relief Work.**—The chief problem in Belgium is not that of providing succour for the destitute and the afflicted; it is rather that of providing the basic foodstuffs for the whole population. The benevolent funds were not and never could have been sufficient to distribute gratuitously all the supplies, nor was there any reason why the Commission should have done so. Those who could afford to pay for food otherwise unobtainable, do pay and should pay for all food they receive. The prices were so arranged that they paid a small percentage above the actual cost in order to constitute a profit which could be added to the benevolent funds to aid their poorer compatriots. Even so, the price of bread and other commodities imported by the Commission is usually ten per cent., or even more, below the current price in London or Paris. This is made possible by the scope of the Commission's operations, by careful and efficient management, and by the amount of volunteer service that the Commission can call upon.

**Charity and Efficiency.**—The Commission has been called the world's greatest charitable enterprise, and so it is. But it is directed in a way that distinguishes it at the outset from nearly all other similar undertakings. As Lord Curzon said: 'This is one of the most striking achievements which we can find anywhere on record. This is the first time in history that a whole people has been fed by a private organisation. . . . It is an absolute miracle of scientific organisation. Every pound of food and supplies is accounted for, and you have the remarkable fact that at this day bread is fetching no more in Antwerp or in Brussels than it is in the City of London. And when it is remembered that the bulk of the work out there is voluntary work, is work gratuitously given by those who take part in it, that again distinguishes it from almost any previous attempt of the kind. Hitherto in political history you almost always find public relief, on a large scale at any rate, associated with extravagance and scandal. But in this case, and I think in this case almost alone, it has been synonymous with economy and efficiency combined.'\*

This was made possible because of the calibre and business efficiency of the men whom Hoover was able to associate with himself in the work. The business of the Commission has always been handled by business men; the problems requiring special knowledge have been dealt with by experts who as a rule volunteered their assistance. Nearly all the men, in fact, who helped to do the work of the Commission were volunteers; men from all walks of life, engineers, business men, lawyers, doctors, clergymen, college professors and students, but alike in their spirit of willing service and in their possession of the qualities required for the successful performance of the work of the Commission. Because of the character of its work, the Commission has been able to buy its food supplies at the lowest obtainable price, and to secure ocean transportation on unusually favourable terms. It enjoys special reductions of telegraph rates, railroad tariffs and other charges. It has in Belgium and Northern France the wholehearted co-operation of the ablest men in the various communities, who, as a rule, are engaged also as volunteers in the intricate and difficult business of actual distribution of the food imported. For these reasons it

\* Extract from Earl Curzon's speech at the Mansion House at a meeting of the National Committee for Relief in Belgium, October 12, 1915.

is able to carry on its operations with an overhead or administrative expense of only six-tenths of one per cent. of the money handled, a record never equalled by any other charitable organisation, and one that even in business can hardly be excelled.

**Purpose of this History.**—Most of the misconceptions about the Commission have been due to the complexity of its activities. The time has not come when a full exposition of the origin and history of the Commission can be made. It is not possible now, nor is it within the limits of this undertaking, to present a final historical review of the work done by the Commission.

For the Commission still continues, in spite of the entry of the United States into the war, to bear the burden of purchasing and shipping to Rotterdam the supplies needed by the civil population of Belgium and Northern France. Its work in the occupied territories has been taken over by a Spanish-Dutch protective committee. The American delegate has been replaced by Spanish and Dutch representatives. But the Commission as an organisation is as much alive to-day as ever.

The story of the past three years of its activities can now be told, however, in such a way as to present a general outline of its history. It is the purpose of this sketch to make clear what the Commission for Relief in Belgium is, how it came into existence, what its problems, purposes and methods are, and what results it has accomplished.

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## CHAPTER I

## BELGIUM: THE INVASION AND EARLY RELIEF EFFORTS

## THE INVASION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The Invasion of Belgium.—It was in the early hours of the morning of August 4 that the German Minister to the Court of King Albert delivered the declaration of war from his imperial master to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belgium. A brief half-hour later the advance guard of the field-grey hosts crossed the Belgian frontier, and in the brilliant sunshine of that August morning began the seemingly irresistible attack which was to carry the German armies right across Belgium and far into the heart of France. Not that the invasion was unopposed. Faced with superior numbers, and overwhelmed by the German superiority in artillery and equipment, the Belgian troops fought desperately what they knew from beforehand to be a losing fight, going to their deaths, not for victory's sake, but to gain a few precious days or even hours for the gathering of the French armies. They made the Germans pay dear for their passage, but they were driven ever back, out of Liége, out of Brussels, out of Namur, finally even out of Antwerp, one of the greatest of modern fortresses, that had been thought strong enough to stand a siege of many months, but which fell after only a few days' bombardment with modern long range, high-power siege guns.

The German armies, sweeping west and south across France, were finally out-maneuvred and out-fought on the hill slopes along the Marne. The week that followed the fall of Antwerp, the terrible week when the decimated Belgian army stood fast on the Nieuport-Dixmude line and, unaided, stopped without flinching, though with terrible loss, the desperate attacks of the Kaiser's best troops in their drive for Calais, this same week was to see the end of the war of manœuvres, of open battles, in the west. The Germans, falling back from the Marne, had entrenched on the northern heights of the Aisne valley, and, in the flank movements northward that followed in the succeeding weeks, completed a system of entrenchments that was ultimately to extend from the North Sea to Switzerland. The war of fixed positions that was to continue for more than four years of savage and desperate fighting had begun.

The Occupied Territories. The German attempt to destroy the military forces of the western Allies had failed, but the Germans had succeeded in gaining possession of all of Belgium save the extreme western corner, and of a great slice of French territory. They were in possession of all the coal mines and industrial establishments of Belgium, as well as of the most important industrial and mining areas of France, the coal-producing region of Lille-Valenciennes, and the iron-ore deposits of Longwy-Briey. They held also the rich agricultural areas of the Flanders, the Hesbaye, and the Hainaut, in Belgium, and in France the productive alluvial valleys of the Somme, the Oise, and the Aisne. To the moment of the present writing they continue to hold Belgium and nine-tenths of the French territory occupied four years ago. It is not the purpose here to deal with military events; attention must be turned rather to those occupied areas just mentioned, and to the fortunes of the captive populations during these long four years of military occupation by a bitterly hated enemy.

The Devastation of War.—The war had brought in its wake the inevitable train of calamities. Hundreds of villages had been completely destroyed, thousands partially so. A few of the larger towns, such as Louvain, Dinant and Aerschot, had suffered a similar fate. Hundreds of thousands of people, leaving their houses in terror, had fled from the scourge of the kind of warfare waged by the German armies. Many of these refugees had reached Holland, France, or England, and there they have remained for the most part until the present time, save in the case of those who fled to Holland, most of whom sooner or later went back into Belgium. It is estimated that the number of Belgian refugees in England in 1917 was 100,000, in France 215,000, and in Holland 80,000, while some 200,000 are engaged in military service. By far the greater part of the Belgian population, some seven millions in all, were caught by the speed of the invasion, and even most of those who had fled from their homes remained for refuge in the Belgian cities. Brussels was suddenly flooded with a new population of about 200,000, who came for the most part from ruined villages and towns; Louvain, Liège, Ghent, Antwerp, and all the other principal places received thousands of these homeless refugees who had to be cared for. The burden on the municipal administrations was thus enormously increased.

Suspension of Economic Activities.—At the same time the whole of Belgium's normal economic life was suddenly brought to an end. The wheels of industry ceased to turn. The admirable transportation system of Belgium, with its completeness and efficiency, was thoroughly disrupted. Railroad bridges and tunnels were in many cases destroyed. The canals were blocked by blown-up bridges and sunken barges. The greater part of the motor-cars were requisitioned and the use of those that remained was forbidden. Horses were also requisitioned by the thousand, and the general prohibition of circulation made any communication or transport, and even travel on foot, almost impossible. The vicinal railways and tram lines were suspended for some months. The postal, telephone, and telegraph services were all cut off. It was not until after several months of occupation that a restricted postal service under military censorship was set up. The use of the telegraph service under even more restricted conditions was not permitted for nearly a year.

The financial situation was equally chaotic. All currency rapidly disappeared from circulation. The declaration of a moratorium and the suspension of communications practically put an end to credit. The internal commerce was completely paralysed by the lack of communication and transport facilities, and the breaking down of the credit system, and all external commerce automatically ceased when the Germans occupied the country.

The Food Question.—The whole situation made the normal traffic in foodstuffs quite impossible, and as the cities never possessed any considerable stocks, and were dependent always on the steady flow of internal commerce for supplies, the food question soon became very serious. The existing stocks had been largely depleted in the first weeks of war, either by destruction or by requisitions. The invasion had occurred just at the beginning of the harvest season. A great percentage of the 1914 crop was never harvested, but was trampled under foot by the marching armies, or left standing because of the lack of hands to harvest it. Consequently, even if Belgium in normal times had been self-supporting, the larger agglomerations of population—which never have stocks proportionate to their needs, and whose needs had greatly increased because of the influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees who had to be

fed—would in any case have soon been in very desperate straits. The fear of a food-shortage naturally only increased the difficulty, for it led to hoarding of stocks, and to speculation by that part of the population which is always ready to prey on the misfortunes of the rest. The war had brought not only its immediate disasters to Belgium. It had brought also the threat of an even greater peril—a famine.

**Belgium's Dependence on Imported Food.**—Before the significance of the relief work that was almost immediately to be undertaken—first by the Belgians alone, later with outside aid—can be appreciated, it is necessary to have clearly in mind a few essential facts about the normal economic life of Belgium. This little country that has through the centuries been the cock-pit of Europe, in whose area decisive battles have been fought in most of the great wars since the time of Julius Cæsar is the most highly industrialised and most densely populated country of Europe. With an area of only 11,373 square miles, it yet had a population of nearly 8,000,000 at the outbreak of the war, or nearly 700 to the square mile. The agricultural industry of Belgium, so highly and intensively developed, produced only one-fourth of the cereals normally consumed by the primarily bread-eating population. In the highly organised international commerce of pre-war times, Belgium found this condition no disadvantage. The value of her exported manufactures was sufficient to pay many times over the cost of the food to be imported. The country had always been a large buyer of foodstuffs. The following tables will show exactly the situation of Belgium so far as her normal pre-war food supply was concerned :—

#### Cereal Production and Consumption

COUNTRY.	Local Production.	Imported.	Kilos consumed per annum per capita (in kilograms).	Individual Consumption per diem (in grams).
Belgium ... ..	22 per cent.	78 per cent.	244	670
France ... ..	82 „	18 „	215	590
Germany ... ..	65 „	35 „	87	240
United Kingdom ... ..	8 „	92 „	163	445
United States ... ..	100 „	—	144	400

#### Population and Industry

COUNTRY.	Population per square mile (1913).	Exports and Imports per capita (1913) in £ sterling.	Military and Naval Expenditure (1913) in £ sterling.
Belgium ... ..	652	43.1	0.54
Northern France ... ..	370	—	—
France ... ..	189	15.5	1.45
Germany ... ..	310	15.9	1.50
United Kingdom ... ..	374	31.2	1.59
United States ... ..	31	9.1	0.54



### Belgium's Food Supply

In tons of 1,000 kilograms. (Figures for 1912.)

ARTICLE.	Native Production.	Imports.	Total Consumption.
Wheat ... ..	410,000	1,490,000	1,900,000
Rye ... ..	501,000	447,000	948,000
Dried Vegetables ... ..	24,000	55,000	79,000
Rice ... ..	Nil.	51,000	51,000
Meats and Fats ... ..	figure unknown.	60,000	—
Maize ... ..	Nil.	556,000	556,000
Barley, Oats ... ..	592,000	512,000	1,104,000

Exports and National Prosperity.—Belgium was thus dependent on international trade for more than three-fourths of her bread, and on the possibility of importation for the very basis of her national diet. A very large proportion of her people were equally dependent on Belgium's commerce and exports for their livelihood. Half the population was engaged in industry. Their income and well-being depended absolutely on the maintenance of industry and exports. The Belgians, it is true, were a thrifty people. Happily for them they were in the habit of keeping savings accounts. But once their incomes ceased these savings rapidly dwindled, and with each month the number of destitute increased. At the outbreak of the war, dividends as well as wages were for the most part suspended, and many families that had been very comfortably situated found themselves without ready money or any means of raising any. The hardest hit of all the population were perhaps the middle classes—those in the professions, in official positions, or engaged in small businesses. This class rarely possesses any considerable savings, and is in the habit of living very comfortably on a fixed income. The war stopped this income and people of gentle birth and breeding, accustomed to luxury and ease, found themselves reduced to direst poverty.

This sketch of the condition brought on in Belgium by the war is necessarily only an outline of the situation with which the Belgian people were confronted. It should help, however, to an understanding of the problem of relief. There was only one-fourth enough food in the country to feed the population; and even if there had been food, a large proportion of the people would not have had the means to purchase it. By November 1, 1914, 1,200,000 people were destitute.

#### FIRST STEPS IN THE ORGANISATION OF RELIEF INSIDE BELGIUM

Beginning of Relief Activities in Belgium.—Even before the invasion of Belgium the possibility of a food shortage had been foreseen, and various Belgian communes and other official bodies had taken steps to give relief to the poor and to secure stocks of food. Once the Germans came sweeping over the land, there came immediately the problem of caring for the refugees who fled before the advance of the Prussian troops. Almost at once volunteer relief committees sprang up in all the chief

cities of Belgium to provide shelter, clothing and food to these homeless, terror-stricken refugees. The first relief measures taken in Belgium were designed to relieve their distress, or to take care of the unemployed workmen, many of whom were soon without resources. As time passed and the terrible period of invasion was succeeded by the orderly occupation of the country, the conditions rapidly grew worse. The wholesale requisitions had greatly depleted the stocks of food, and action soon became necessary, in almost every city and even village, if the food for the population was to be provided.

v The First Phase; Local Effort.—The Belgians arose bravely from the terrible shock of the events that had occurred during the invasion to meet the peril. But for some time their efforts were limited to local relief activities. The greater part of Belgium was still in the *etappen* regime.\* No communication was possible between the localities and all circulation was extremely limited. Any co-operation in relief work between various parts of the country at this time was materially impossible.

Relief Activities of Communal Administrations.—It is interesting to observe the parts played in the efforts to relieve the prevailing distress by the constituted authorities and by volunteer activities. The whole machinery of the Belgian central government had been broken down or swept away by the invader, and replaced by the general government set up almost immediately at Brussels. The Belgian provincial administrations were likewise superseded by the German provincial governors, or rigidly controlled by them, so that any initiative in action was in most cases impossible. Only the communal administrations remained fairly intact and possessed the liberty of action to permit them to meet the crisis brought on by the shortage of food and the tremendous increase in destitution. It was a happy circumstance for the Belgian population that the local government was so well organised and so relatively independent in normal times. With all the other governmental institutions swept away, or replaced by German authorities, the communal administrations were alone able to meet the emergency. In many localities the burgomasters and the communal councils acted promptly and effectively. A law had been passed August 4, 1914, providing for action to meet the crisis occasioned by the war, and a royal decree of August 14 gave definite execution to this law, fixed maximum prices on the chief articles of food, and authorised the Belgian provincial governors, or the burgomasters, to fix prices and to requisition such stocks of food as were necessary to secure the provisioning of the population. Acting on this authority the burgomasters in almost all parts of the country proceeded vigorously to carry into execution measures designed to relieve destitution.

Volunteer Relief Committees —Alongside of these communal administrations, sometimes in place of them, sometimes co-operating with them, sometimes subordinate to them, arose a great number and variety of volunteer relief committees. In the midst of a great crisis this phenomenon has often occurred. In any sudden emergency institutions designed for normal times and hampered by red tape and traditions are apt to prove unequal to the situation. Then volunteer action takes the place of official action; the leading men of the community act together to meet the crisis, facing the realities of the situation unhampered by fixed methods of procedure, and intolerant of anything save drastic and direct action. So it was in Belgium in August and September, 1914. Everywhere the natural leaders of the communities came together, and forgetting political, social, religious and personal

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\* *Etappen* district was the military zone immediately behind the district of actual operations and extended usually 40 to 70 kilometres (25–45 miles) behind the front.

differences, devoted their time, money and energy to the service of the homeless and the destitute. A marvellous variety and number of relief committees were organised in the chief towns of Belgium to collect funds, to care for the refugees, to feed the destitute, to centralise the existing stocks of food and to attempt to avert the threatened social disaster.

### THE COMITÉ CENTRAL AND ITS ACTIVITIES IN BRUSSELS

**Relief Activities at Brussels.**—It is impossible to describe in detail here this volunteer relief movement in Belgium. What it accomplished can best be indicated by taking as an example the work done in Brussels, the capital and metropolis of Belgium, and the place where the food question was perhaps of the greatest seriousness. The relief organisation that was formed there was interesting, not only for its local activities, but still more because it was destined to become later the nucleus of the great organisation that was to assume the burden of distributing food to the whole population of Belgium. This volunteer committee, formed at Brussels at the beginning of September, accomplished more than any other similar organisation in Belgium, but its problems were much the same as those encountered in all the other cities. The relief activities of the other cities were along somewhat the same lines, and indeed were often modelled directly on the system established in the capital. The work of this Brussels committee exhibits in its most favourable aspect the initiative, energy and ability of the leaders in Belgian civic, business and political life.

**The Action of the Communal Authorities.**—Even before the Germans entered Brussels, on August 21, the food situation had become serious. The various communal administrations had taken steps to prevent speculation, to fix maximum prices, to acquire considerable stocks of flour, rice and other articles of prime necessity, and to establish soup-kitchens for the refugees and for the poor of the city. The problem was made somewhat more difficult by the fact that the agglomeration of population, known as Greater Brussels, is in reality divided into no less than sixteen communes, each with an independent communal administration. Acting under the leadership of M. Max, the energetic and patriotic burgo-master of the city of Brussels properly speaking, the various communal authorities soon agreed on a common line of action to handle the food problem, and arranged to centralise all stocks of food acquired in the hands of the City administration. The food problem became rapidly more acute, in spite of all efforts of the communal administrations. Before the end of August it was practically impossible to purchase more than a pound of flour or sugar at a time, and almost all stocks of tinned goods were sold out, bought by anxious people who besieged the shops in the desire to get hold of a private stock before all was gone. The price of food rose to exorbitant figures. The speculators were active and increased artificially the prices by cornering, or attempting to corner, important quantities of food.

All these various developments, combined with the cutting off of the normal food imports, soon produced a situation of extreme gravity. The poor were no longer able to buy food, and had to be cared for. The communal administrations began to establish soup-kitchens, and attempted to cope with the problem as best they could with limited resources and with steadily diminishing food stocks. After the entry of the Germans into Brussels the friction between the military authorities and the Belgian communal officials made the work even more difficult. There was also added the danger that the communal stocks of food would be requisitioned for the German army.

**The Proposal for a Volunteer Relief Committee.**—The need for a strong unofficial organisation which would bring in the assistance of the ablest and wealthiest men of Brussels was soon felt. Such a private body would command greater resources and would enjoy a greater freedom of action than the communal administrations, hampered and harassed as they now were by their ordinary official duties and by the demands of the military authorities. Steps were therefore taken almost at once to organise such a volunteer committee to cope with the food problem and with the relief of destitution. The prime mover was Ernest Solvay, Belgium's richest man and one of the most public spirited of its citizens. Already, in the first weeks of August, he had organised a committee to care for the refugees. Now, when at the end of August the necessity of an organisation of larger scope and influence was realised, it was Solvay who took the lead in attempting to form a strong committee. A number of the leading men in social, business and banking circles were consulted and agreed to lend their assistance to devise a means of taking decisive action to meet the food crisis. One of the chief figures in the formation of this committee was Emile Francqui, a man of strong will and great executive capacity, and one of the most capable directors of the Société Générale de Belgique, the most important financial establishment in Belgium.

**The part played by Americans.**—At the same time came a suggestion from another quarter which was to give an entirely new aspect to the committee and its whole future work. There had been organised in Brussels early in August a committee of Americans resident in Brussels, under the patronage and supervision of the American Minister, Brand Whitlock, to aid Americans caught in Europe by the war and to assist them on their homeward journey, and to aid the Legation and Consulate in organising the American colony in Brussels. This committee included among its members several Americans who had been prominent in the business and financial life of Brussels—Dannie Heinemann, his associate William Hulse, and a mining engineer, Millard Shaler. As the food crisis grew serious, the committee had decided to attempt to provide a certain quantity of supplies for the American colony, and Shaler, who, through his connections with mining companies operating in the Congo, had experience in food purchasing, undertook to make such purchases and to store them in the Legation. When the Germans entered Brussels and the crisis grew worse, Heinemann, who had been informed of the proposal to form a central relief committee for Greater Brussels, volunteered his assistance, and suggested to Francqui and others that it would be of great utility to the proposed committee to invite the American and Spanish Ministers, who had elected to stay in Belgium after its occupation by the Germans, to act as patrons; in this way the committee would be given a neutral character and protection against requisition of its stocks of supplies might be assured. Francqui approved heartily of the idea and co-operated with Ernest Solvay, Burgomaster Max, Emmanuel Janssens and other notable men in drawing plans for the formation of a general relief committee to solicit subscriptions, centralise food stocks and arrange for distribution of relief to the destitute of Greater Brussels. The Spanish Minister, the Marquis de Villalobar, and the American Minister, Brand Whitlock, gladly accepted the invitation to act as patrons, and met with the organisers to discuss plans.

**The Formation of the Comité Central.**—On August 28, Burgomaster Max issued an appeal to the population of Brussels announcing the creation of a service of food distributions by means of soup-kitchens and calling on all who could afford it to contribute either directly to the city officials or to the new committee then in process of formation under the patronage of the Ministers and with Ernest Solvay as president.

A preliminary meeting was held on September 1 to set the machinery of the new 'Comité Central de Secours et d'Alimentation' in motion. This was presided over by Francqui, who was recognised as being the man possessing the strength and backing necessary for the successful conduct of the Committee's work. Among those present were Count Cicogna, an Italian prominent in industrial circles; Emmanuel Janssens of the Solvay Company; Josse Allard, a banker; M. Despret; F. Van Bree, Secretary of the Committee, Hugh Gibson, Secretary of the American Legation, Heinemann, and Hulse. The task to be undertaken was discussed, and it was agreed that it was necessary to form a strong private body, possessing sufficient prestige and credit to carry on large operations, and enjoying a neutral character such as would induce the local officials, the German authorities, the national government, the neutral powers and public opinion to give it their confidence. At this first meeting the general scheme of organisation was sketched out and plans were made for beginning activities at once. Ernest Solvay was asked to serve as President of the Committee, and the Governors of the Banque Nationale and of the Société Générale were invited to act as vice-presidents; an Executive Committee was formed with Francqui at its head, to take charge of the actual administration of the Committee. A memorandum was drawn up to be sent to the Burgomasters of the Communes of Greater Brussels, announcing the formation of the Comité Central, and stating the conditions under which the relief work would be undertaken. The communes were to receive subsidies to maintain the soup distributions under the supervision of, and according to the rules prescribed by, the Comité Central.

Two days later, on September 3, a meeting of the Executive Committee was held in which the detailed working out of the Committee's plans was outlined. In attendance were Francqui, Allard, Count Cicogna, Em. Janssens, L. Cousin, L. Solvay, Heinemann, Hulse and Van Bree. It was decided that in each commune a communal committee should be organised dependent on the Comité Central but with the greatest freedom of individual action. The Comité Central would name a delegate to each communal committee, and these delegates would meet daily to keep in touch with the general situation. A central warehouse was decided upon, and a special sub-committee under Heinemann's direction and including the other Americans of the Committee, and also prominent Belgians such as M. L. Solvay, was appointed to take charge of the central warehouse and to secure food. A clothing department was established under the direction of M. Em. Janssens. An appeal for contributions in money, food or clothing was drawn up.

**First Meeting of the Comité Central, September 5, 1914.**—On September 5 the first general meeting of the Comité Central was held, with Ernest Solvay in the chair. He opened the meeting with an address describing the difficult problems they had before them, and calling on all to join patriotically in the work. He prophetically referred also to the possibility of ultimate extension of the work of the Committee. 'It does not seem doubtful to me,' he said, 'that later on the generalisation and extension of the movement which we are starting will impose itself upon us, and that the intervention of all Belgians in comfortable circumstances in favour of the Belgians who have suffered misfortunes will then be acclaimed and rendered obligatory. In such a case we will have only been making a start.' He closed his speech with eloquent thanks to the Ministers for their aid, and by enjoining the Committee to set to work actuated by the common motive.

**Activities of the Comité Central.**—The working principles adopted by the Comité Central at this first meeting were few and practical. Soup-kitchens and canteens were to be

established and subsidised in all the communes of Greater Brussels. A uniform daily ration of 200 grams (seven ounces) of bread and a half-litre (a pint) of soup was to be everywhere distributed. This ration was not to cost more than fifteen centimes, and everyone was expected to pay five centimes for the ration he received. The commune would, however, issue free soup and bread tickets to those who were completely destitute. The Comité Central would contribute five centimes to the cost of each ration, the balance to be paid by the communal charity office or by the communal administration. Nothing was to be distributed gratuitously in a manner conducive to abuses. A central control and a central book-keeping system was decided upon. The draft of the appeal for subscriptions was approved. The Comité, realising the difficulty of finding the necessary food supplies for its work from local sources, decided to make an attempt to obtain permission to import food and to secure subscriptions from abroad, and to this end it resolved to demand assurances from the German military authorities that the food of the Committee, and especially food that might be imported, should be free from all requisition.

The Committee requested Burgomaster Max to take up this question of importing food with the military governor of Brussels.

The Proclamation of the Comité Central.—The Comité Central promptly began to put its plans into effect. On the morning of September 6 the population of Brussels found placarded on the walls a rose-coloured appeal to the public under the superscription 'Comité Central de Secours et d'Alimentation.' This announced the formation of the Committee, proclaimed its purposes, and called on the well-to-do for subscriptions to aid in the provisioning of the necessitous classes.

There was no suggestion in the work of the Committee at this time of the great extension of its activities that was to come two months later. At this time the Battle of the Marne was just beginning, Antwerp was still in Belgian hands, and fighting was in progress only a few miles from Brussels. Even the most pessimistic hardly believed the war would last more than a few months. All the plans of the Committee were for temporary relief to the destitute in Greater Brussels and in nearby towns such as Louvain. It was not until more than a month later that the possibility of a general food famine throughout the whole of Belgium began to be seriously feared.

The work of the Committee in all the Brussels communes was soon effectively organised. All local stocks of food available were purchased by the Committee, and agents were sent out into the surrounding country to secure grain and flour. So far as possible the Committee made use of already existing organisations for the purposes of distribution. The soup-kitchens were organised under the control of the communal committees. These and many already existing charitable institutions were subsidised by the Comité Central to permit them to aid more effectively in relieving distress.

Comité Central seeks Subscriptions from Abroad.—In order to raise sufficient funds, subscriptions were asked for, not only in Belgium, but from the outside world as well. Francqui engaged M. Prud'homme, an official in the Canadian Branch of the Société Générale, with the formation of a committee in Canada to collect contributions to be forwarded to Belgium. On September 9 Francqui wrote to the Belgian Minister in London, asking him to send out an appeal for the world's charitable offerings, and to attempt to have committees organised by the Belgian diplomatic and consular representatives in all countries, 'on whose sympathy Belgium has a right to depend,' to solicit contributions to Belgian relief funds. Shaler was made the emissary of the Committee, and not only carried out the

letters referred to, but added his personal efforts to bring success to the appeal of the Comité Central. This appeal was widely acted upon, especially in Great Britain, the self-governing dominions of the British Empire and in the United States, where dozens of Belgian relief committees were almost immediately formed under the patronage or direction of the Belgian Ministers and Consuls.

**The Search for Food Supplies.**—Next in importance to the question of raising funds to maintain the distribution of food to the destitute came the problem of finding the necessary supplies. The Comité Central set about supplementing the work of the various communal authorities in bringing the existing stocks of flour and other staple foods under their control. When immunity from requisition both of indigenous and of imported supplies was accorded the Comité Central by the German authorities, in the middle of September, it was able to proceed in its gathering of supplies locally and abroad without fear of disturbance by the German army. On October 1 the Communes of Greater Brussels decided to confide all the stocks they had collected and put in care of the city of Brussels to the Comité Central, and after that time the Committee had full supervision of the purchase, warehousing and distribution of all the food stocks.

**Activities of Heinemann's Sub-Committee.**—It was in this direction, in getting immunity from the Germans from requisition of the supplies of the Comité Central and in obtaining permission to import from abroad, that the sub-committee presided over by Mr. Heinemann was especially active. As soon as the stocks in Brussels grew low, efforts were made by Heinemann and his associates to purchase grain and flour in the country. On September 10 Heinemann himself went to Louvain to ascertain what stocks of flour still lay in the mills there and to arrange to obtain permission to ship a part of these stocks to Brussels. Agents of his sub-committee were sent to all the neighbouring agricultural communes in Brabant, and later on even into the other adjoining provinces to purchase grain from the farmers. In the midst of the general disorder the Heinemann sub-committee arranged the transportation of these acquired stocks to Brussels with great celerity and efficiency, overcoming what to less persistent men would have seemed insuperable obstacles. As Mr. Heinemann himself said, 'The work of this sub-committee was most difficult and arduous. There were no railroad trains, the canal service was suspended, the bridges were destroyed, the traffic of the vicinal railways was greatly limited, and the food could be brought to the capital only with the greatest difficulties. . . . The situation was still more aggravated by the civil and military organisation of the Germans, then still in process of formation. One did not know whom to address to obtain the information and authorisations necessary to bring the food to Brussels.' \*

The Brussels stocks would not have lasted until the end of September if they had not been largely supplemented by the quantities of food secured by this sub-committee. As a result of Heinemann's negotiations in Brussels and Louvain a considerable part of the flour at Louvain was ceded by the military authorities to the Comité Central. But then came the question of transporting this flour to Brussels. Louvain lies only thirty minutes from Brussels by train, but trains were not running. The vicinal railway between Brussels and Louvain was suspended. Undaunted, however, Mr. Heinemann tackled the problem. While easting about for some means of transporting the flour from Louvain, the brilliant idea came to him of making use of the motor-trucks of the Brussels Fire Department. After some

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\* Heinemann's Report.

urging he obtained the necessary permits from the Belgian and German authorities, and one fine September morning these motor-trucks came to Louvain to carry the flour to Tervueren, some ten miles out of Brussels. From Tervueren to Brussels ran a tramline of a company under Heinemann's control, and this was utilised to carry the flour into the city. After further negotiations, permission was finally obtained from the Germans for the vicinal railways to reinstall their services, and, from September 24 on, the stocks of food bought in Louvain or in the provinces could be transported to Brussels by less strenuous measures than an appeal to the Fire Department.

All these efforts, however, only temporarily postponed the day when the supplies for the soup-kitchens would be lacking; and the general food situation grew constantly worse. Often the central depots contained only enough flour for a few days. On September 22, Heinemann, for example, informed Burgomaster Max that there were only three days' supply of flour on hand. In the central depot there were only 5,700 sacks, whereas the daily consumption was 3,000 sacks.\* From one source or another, however, the necessary supplies were always found, and from the beginning of the operation of the canteens in the first week of September the population of Brussels, dependent on these canteens, was never without its ration for even a single day.

**Relief Activities of the Comité Central : Soup-Canteens.**—The relief activities undertaken by the Comité Central expanded greatly as the weeks passed. Many new canteens were established until some sixty were in operation to supply the daily ration of 200 grams of bread and a half-litre of soup per person. It was soon recognised also that this ration was not sufficient for those who were completely destitute and without other sources of food supply. The committee, therefore, decided to distribute through the soup-canteens a second daily ration. This was to be composed of warm cooked foods, such as potatoes, rice, bacon, etc., when the facilities of the canteen permitted; otherwise the food supplies were distributed to be cooked at the home. The cost of this second ration, like that of the first, was limited to 15 centimes, of which 5 centimes was contributed by the Comité Central, 5 centimes by the local committee and 5 centimes either by the recipient or, if he were completely destitute, by the local charity office. By the end of September 120,000 daily rations were being distributed in these canteens. For the whole month there was an average of 80,000 rations served daily.†

**Canteens for Babies.**—In addition to these canteens for adults, the Comité Central very early decided to organise a special food distribution for babies under three years of age. There was already in existence a charity known as 'Les Petites Abeilles' ('The little Bees'), which was devoted to the care of the babies of the poor, and on September 9 the Comité Exécutif at Francqui's suggestion decided to subsidise this and to extend its work. Thirty-two canteens were soon organised, and by October 1 rations of milk and other suitable foods were being distributed daily to 3,000 babies.

In October and November the destitution rapidly increased, and in consequence the work of the canteens became heavier and the quantity of supplies required grew ever greater. By December 1, 218,000 daily rations were being distributed to adults and 30,000 to infants, i.e. nearly one-third of the population of the city was being fed by the canteens. Most of those thus fed were completely destitute, and the cost of the rations fell upon the Comité Central.

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\* Heinemann to Max, September 22, 1914. Heinemann's Report.

† Reports of Comité Exécutif to Comité Central, October 15, 1914, December 1, 1914.



The Clothing Committee.—The problem of providing clothing for the destitute was handled in an equally systematic manner by the efforts of a committee presided over by M. Em. Janssens. He was one of the organisers, and was from the first one of the leading spirits in the Executive Committee of the Comité Central and later of the Comité National. He was to remain at the head of the clothing department he organised in September 1914 through the whole period of the activities of the Comité National. He opened a big central warehouse early in September and created a systematic organisation to collect, manufacture and distribute clothing. He found already in existence a charitable organisation, 'Œuvre du Travail,' which maintained workshops for employing at a modest wage women of the poor to make clothing to be distributed gratuitously to the poor. Janssens now invited this organisation to extend its activities into every commune of Greater Brussels. Workshops were to be established subject to the control of the Comité Central and under the direction of the communal committees. Large numbers of poor girls and women were in this way given remunerative employment, and a very considerable quantity of clothing was soon available for distribution to the destitute. From the organisation developed for this purpose grew later the 'Division du Vêtement' of the Comité National.

Many other forms of charitable intervention in behalf of the distressed part of the population were undertaken by the Comité Central. A loan bank was established to loan money on any good security at the low rate of 3 per cent. This was especially beneficial, as it had become almost impossible to borrow money, and thousands of families owning some property, who had been on the verge of destitution for lack of ready money, were able to maintain their households and tide over the worst period. Many of the existing charities were patronised and subsidised by the Comité Central, which made use of the sums in its possession to afford the maximum of relief to those in distress.

### EARLY RELIEF MEASURES IN THE BELGIAN PROVINCES

While all this work of organisation was going on in Brussels, a similar activity in aiding the necessitous was being displayed in many other places in Belgium. Wherever and as soon as there was any distress, and especially in the war-devastated and in the more densely-populated areas, the communal administrations and the volunteer relief committees were to be found at work attempting to husband the food resources and to take care of the war sufferers and the destitute.

Relief Measures in Liège City and Province.—The population of Liège and its vicinity was the first in Belgium to suffer from the war, and the distress was acute from the first. The burgomasters had begun from the time of the outbreak of hostilities to make desperate efforts to deal with the situation. Stocks of grain and potatoes were requisitioned by the communal authorities for the needs of the population, in accordance with the law of August 4 and the King's edict of August 14. Wherever possible, the city authorities arranged with the agricultural communes to take over the stocks in excess of the local needs. For a time the needs of the urban communities were supplied in this way. Volunteer committees arose, here as elsewhere, to direct or assist in the work of relief, and they did their work so well that in the first weeks no one actually lacked bread.

In many of the communes about Liège, which had suffered considerable devastation

from war action or from German 'punitive' measures, the organisation of the relief work was more difficult, as the local resources were not sufficient to meet the needs. The arrondissement of Verviers, to the east of Liège, was the first Belgian area invaded, and many places had been wholly or partially destroyed. An energetic local committee was created at Verviers which organised the relief work in the arrondissement, bought up stocks of grain and potatoes, established soup-kitchens, and cared for the homeless and the war sufferers. Similarly, in the area of Greater Liège a special committee was formed on September 7 to solicit funds for relief work and to establish soup-canteens for distributing rations to the unemployed workmen, most of whom were soon destitute. Within a few weeks this committee in Liège, assisted by 700 volunteer workers and supported by large private subscriptions, was distributing nearly 50,000 daily rations of soup and bread.

Committees of 'ravitaillement' and of 'secours,' modelled on those of Liège, were soon organised in nearly all the urban areas of the province. These were aided by the communal administrations, by the local 'Bureaux de Bienfaisance,' by trades unions, industrial societies, and by wealthy individuals. These various local efforts were soon found to be insufficient to cope with the situation, as the distress increased and the food supplies grew more difficult or impossible to obtain. Some of the leading manufacturers and business men of Liège therefore resolved to form a special committee, somewhat of the character of the Comité Central at Brussels, to supervise and assist the relief activities in the industrial areas of the Meuse Valley about Liège, not included in Greater Liège nor coming within the jurisdiction of the committee that was successfully struggling with the relief problem of that city. A meeting was held September 21, at which was organised the 'Comité d'Alimentation et d'Hygiène de l'Arrondissement de Liège.' M. Paul Van Hoegaerden, President of the Bourse at Liège and of the 'Associations industrielles et commerciales' (Industrial and Commercial Association), had been the chief instigator in the formation of this committee and became its chairman. He was in constant touch with the committee of Greater Liège, and was aided by a number of the leading men, such as Messrs. Gregoire and Laboulle, members of the Deputation Permanente, and M. Hallet, Commissioner for the Arrondissement of Waremme.

This committee commanded larger resources than was available for any local committee, and gradually extended its sphere of action, taking in district after district, and co-operating with the communal administrations and local relief committees. At first only five districts were included, each district comprising a canton, according to the former political grouping. On October 12 three more cantonal districts were incorporated into the area served by the committee, and in the early part of November three additional districts were taken in. The eleven districts thus ultimately included within the committee's jurisdiction had a population of some 220,000. The work done was much the same as that of the Comité Central in Brussels, and consisted of the collection of subscriptions, the acquisition of food stocks, and the supply and supervision of the soup and bread distribution in the different communes. Aid was also given to the communes that had been wholly or partially destroyed in the first weeks of the war.

An attempt was made at the end of September to obtain food from Holland, a deputation being sent to state the desperate needs and to attempt to secure supplies. Some small shipments were actually obtained from Holland, and a few lighters of grain were bought in Antwerp before its fall and shipped through Holland via the Dordrecht-

Maastricht Canal to Liège, but the supplies thus obtained were insignificant in proportion to the rapidly growing need and the ominous disappearance of the available local stocks.

It was at this point that the Liège committees, apprised by M. Jacques Van Hoegaerden of the organisation of the Comité Central at Brussels, resolved to appeal to this central committee to lend its aid to Liège. M. Jacques Van Hoegaerden was instructed to see Em. Janssens in Brussels, to expose the Liège situation and ask for affiliation with the Comité Central. In a letter of October 13 the Liège committees formally appealed to the Comité Central. As it will be later pointed out, by this time the Comité Central had come to the realisation of the necessity of extending its aid to all Belgium. It therefore replied to the Liège committee on October 23, agreeing to permit the Liège committee, enlarged to include the whole province, to affiliate with it, and announcing that it had decided to take the name of 'Comité National' \* to better indicate its new functions and responsibilities.

M. Paul Van Hoegaerden, President of the Committee for Liège arrondissement, immediately set about reorganising the already existing committees and forming committees where there were yet none. Regional committees, each to include the arrondissement of its chief place within its jurisdiction, were organised at Verviers on October 27, at Huy on October 31, and at Waremme a few days later.

The committee of Liège was reorganised to include the city of Liège and all the communes of the arrondissement. On November 16th, delegates of the four regional committees met in Liège, and the organisation of the provincial committee of Liège was then completed. The various regional committees in the meantime had arranged for the organisation of dependent committees in each commune. Most of this later development came, of course, after the organisation of the Commission for Relief in Belgium and of the Comité National, and was directly instigated by the plans of those two bodies.

Early Relief Activities in Luxembourg.—The relief organisation that was formed to aid the province of Luxembourg had certain characteristics that distinguished the relief movement from that of the other provinces. It is the largest and least populous of the Belgian provinces, with a population of 230,000 living in the scattered communes of the wooded, hilly Ardennes region. There was practically no industrial life in the province. The leading men connected with the Luxembourg were for the most part noblemen and wealthy business men, who resided most of the year in Brussels, and who owned châteaux or summer residences in the Ardennes.

The war operations in the southern and western parts of the province had led to a proportionally greater devastation than elsewhere. No region of Belgium suffered to the same extent. A large number of the villages were practically wiped out of existence. The local authorities found themselves faced with the problem of sheltering, feeding and clothing practically all of the population which still remained in the devastated areas. Such a task was beyond the means that were locally available. The needs were recognised very quickly, however, as a result of visits made to Luxembourg by some of the wealthy property owners who lived chiefly in Brussels, and it was soon decided to form in Brussels a 'Comité de Secours du Luxembourg' to send money and supplies to aid the worst afflicted regions. Among the members of this committee were such prominent Belgians as the

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\* See report Liège Committee to Comité National, December 1914.

Baron Auguste Goffinet, Baron Evence Coppee, junior, M. J. Devolda, a former Minister, the Senator Speyer, Baron Albert d'Huart, a member of the Chamber of Representatives, Dr. Albert Delcourt, M. Tournay-Solvay, a capitalist, and the attorneys Thomas Braun and Georges Leclercq. They collected subscriptions to the amount of some 30,000 francs, and on October 13 a shipment of clothing was sent for distribution in the devastated communes. In the south-western part of the province over two thousand houses had been destroyed, and more than ten thousand people were homeless. The efforts of the committee were at first devoted exclusively to assisting this part of the province. The northern areas, with their agricultural communes, needed very little help, and nothing was done to assist them until the end of October.

The committee at Brussels got into touch with prominent residents of the province, such as the Count de Briey, of Ethe, and M. Lambiotta, of Marbehan, and encharged them with supervising the distribution of relief. Food was bought in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and brought in for distribution. The burgomasters were advised to act on the King's edict of August 14, and to requisition local stocks of food to meet the needs of the destitute. In many of the towns local relief committees were organised to act with the committee in Brussels. The activities of this committee were gradually extended. In October a subsidy of 20,000 francs was received from the Comité Central, and on October 27 the committee was reorganised as a provincial committee to act with the Comité National in the work of distributing food in all Belgium. All the senators and deputies of the province and other prominent officials and citizens were added to the committee. It was decided to maintain the central office at Brussels since all food for the Luxembourg would be shipped to Brussels by lighter and from thence by rail. Sixteen regional zones of distribution were created in the province, with a central warehouse and a regional committee in each, and arrangements were made for holding weekly meetings at Brussels on Saturdays. By December 1 the province was completely organised, and the Comité Provincial was in a position to receive and distribute efficiently its quota of imported supplies.\*

Relief Activities in Namur.—The province of Namur had suffered as heavily as the Luxembourg in the first weeks of the war from the devastation of modern battles, and from massacre and wanton destruction. Such places as Dinant, Andenne, Tamines, were the scenes of horrible and bloody punitive measures on the part of the German troops. Hundreds of the population were killed, in Dinant about 800, in Andenne 400, in Tamines 600, and the greater part of the houses were burned. Nearly every commune in the province was faced immediately with the necessity of caring for homeless and panic-stricken refugees. The conditions in the devastated towns were heart-rending. The communal officials and charity offices devoted their most active efforts to those in need. They were aided by the greater part of the wealthy residents, who there form an almost feudal aristocracy of the best type, and by the parish priests, who were everywhere active in the relief of suffering. Some of the volunteer committees that were formed accomplished splendid results in a very short space of time, as in Dinant, where temporary shelters were erected to house the homeless, clothing was provided, and food distributed to the destitute. The Dinant committee, at the instigation of M. Brisbois, made an appeal to people in Brussels interested in Dinant, and as a result there was organised in the capital on September 4 a 'Comité de Secours aux Dinantais.' Over 25,000 francs were

\* See reports of Luxembourg Committee, October 27, 1914, and December 17, 1914.

immediately subscribed, and some sixty-seven tons of clothing sent to Dinant, the first shipments arriving September 10. In Andenne, Ciney and similar places also the relief work was begun almost immediately after the passage of the German troops.

But the terrible distress prevailing in many localities was too great even for the most devoted local action. Conditions rapidly grew worse, and the resources of many of the communes began to disappear just when the need grew greatest. So here, as in Luxembourg, the wealthy residents decided to form in Brussels a 'Comité de Secours et d'Alimentation de la province de Namur,' which was at once recognised and aided by the Comité Central. The Baron Albert d'Huart, a prominent nobleman and politician, brother-in-law of the Belgian Premier, the Baron de Brocqueville, became chairman of this committee, and it at once began an active campaign for subscriptions. It also undertook a general supervision of the various local relief committees, aiding them as much as possible, and calling into existence cantonal and district committees to assist it in its work of supervision and distribution.

This committee was from the first in close touch with the Comité Central, and early in October appealed to it and to the American Minister to extend the activities of the Comité Central, and to attempt to import supplies for general distribution. The committee also sent a delegate to Holland about the same time to attempt, in co-operation with the Liège delegations, to secure food there. But the efforts were quite unavailing until the Comité Central was in a position, through the Commission for Relief in Belgium, to supply food to all Belgium. When that was finally assured the Namur committee was converted into the 'Comité Provincial de Secours et d'Alimentation de Namur.' On November 22 the first meeting of this committee was held in Namur, and plans were then adopted to organise cantonal and communal committees throughout the province in accordance with the instructions received from the Comité National. The Baron d'Huart became president, the Baron de Gaiffier et d'Hestroy, vice-president, and Max Wasseige, secretary, of this committee. In a few weeks its organisation was completed, and when the first American delegates arrived it was ready for its work.

**Relief Work in the Hainaut.**—In the province of Hainaut the evolution of the organisation of relief activities differed radically from that in the other provinces. Here the volunteer committees never played so prominent nor so effective a part as in the rest of Belgium. It was official action rather than the spontaneous appearance of volunteer activities that organised and administered the work of relief. The communal administrations of the province were to a great extent in the hands of socialists, and they were more ready to step into the breach and establish an effective administration of the food supply than the more conservative officials in the other parts. Then, too, the German civil governor of the Hainaut from the first took an active interest in the people entrusted to his rule, and encouraged and protected the efforts of the communal administrations in so far as it lay in his power to do so. His attitude inspired confidence and made it possible for the communal officials to act with greater effect than in many of the other provinces. The Deputation Permanente co-operated willingly and effectively with him and with the communes, and as a result the official action was in most cases adequate to cope with the situation.

Hainaut was fortunate in escaping much of the devastation that caused so much immediate and acute distress in the other provinces. The extreme western part is a very rich agricultural region, and was as a result one of the last areas in Belgium to feel the

pressure of the economic and social difficulties arising from the invasion. The eastern and central parts, on the other hand, were the most highly industrial and most densely populated areas of Europe. They comprise the three chief coal mining areas, the districts of Charleroi, the Center and the Borinage (about Mons), and in consequence it possessed a large working population that was soon without money or bread. At Charleroi a German quartermaster's office had been established, with the result that large requisitions took place and the local stocks were practically exhausted.

To assure the food supply of these areas the burgomasters had held meetings in the very beginning of August, before the occupation by the Germans, and formed associations which met weekly or even oftener to discuss the food problem and devise relief measures. The local stocks were requisitioned in accordance with the edict of August 14, and certain mills were practically taken over by the Association of Burgomasters to provide flour for their communes. The passage of the German troops greatly aggravated the situation for some days, but the Association of Burgomasters and the Deputation Permanente soon put themselves in touch with the German civil governor and found him ready to support them. From the first the relief efforts in Hainaut were directed separately for the eastern part of the province about Charleroi, and for the western section about Mons; the activities in these two regions will therefore be described separately.

At Charleroi on September 5 a meeting of the burgomasters of the region was held to discuss the situation with Dr. Kaufmann of the general government, and he, showing sympathy for their work, asked them to send a delegation to meet the General Governor, Baron von der Goltz. M. Devreux, Burgomaster of Charleroi, and M. Buisset, a deputy, were received the following day by the Governor-General. As a result of the interview they were accorded 250 tons of flour from the Louvain mills, and this shipment, which arrived shortly after, helped to relieve the situation. They were also promised that requisitions would be stopped in the region about Charleroi and that all stocks of cereals would be reserved exclusively for the population of that area. This was formally decreed by an order of September 30, setting apart all stocks of cereals in a radius of 15 kilometres for the exclusive use of the population of the Charleroi region. By the aid of the stocks of grain thus made available the Charleroi region was able to live from day to day until the imports of the Commission began. Toward the end of October, however, the ration of bread, originally fixed at 200 grams (7 ounces), was cut to 150 grams (5 ounces), and on November 15, just before the first Commission shipments arrived, the ration had been reduced to only 75 grams per day.

About the middle of October the Hainaut committees received from the Governor-General promises that any supplies they might buy outside of Belgium would be exempted from all requisition. Devreux and Buisset were given passports to go to London, where they arrived to find the Commission for Relief in Belgium already in the process of organisation, and they were able to return with the glad news that the whole of Belgium would be supplied with food by that Commission. On October 28 they decided to form a central committee for Eastern Hainaut, with its headquarters at Charleroi.

In the efforts to meet the food shortage in Eastern Hainaut a wealthy Belgian mine-owner and philanthropist, Raoul Warocqué, had taken a very prominent part. He had from August 1 spurred the burgomasters of the neighbourhood of Mariemont, where his château was situated, into action, had initiated plans for centralising stocks and controlling mills. It was he who first devised the plan of distributing bread through

communal depots, instead of leaving it to the bakers. When the American delegates arrived in the Eastern Hainaut he offered his chateau to them as a residence, and was at all times of great assistance until his failing health compelled him to withdraw from active participation in the work.

In the region about Mons the work of relief had been organised in a similar way to that developed in the Charleroi region. The burgomasters very early formed local and cantonal associations to deal with the food situation. After the period of disorder that followed immediately upon the invasion the work of relief recommenced. The Deputation Permanente, through two of its members, M. Georges Heupgen and M. V. L. Caty, ordered on September 23 the requisition of all stocks of grain still in the hands of the farmers, and these stocks were exempted from requisition by the Germans. Local efforts sufficed to meet the most pressing needs until news came that the provisionment of Belgium had been taken over by the C.R.B. and the Comité National. On October 26 a 'Comité de Ravitaillement du Centre et de l'Ouest de la Province du Hainaut' was organised, and this committee, presently to be supervised by that very active delegate, Robinson Smith, succeeded in its turn in spite of great difficulties in caring for the population until the imported supplies were at hand in sufficient quantity to assure the rations of the whole population.

Many of the large mining companies had from the first taken special measures to care for their own employees, and had secured private stocks of food for distribution to them. In many places volunteer relief committees were organised to aid in the relief work. But the organisation of the relief activities as a whole bore the stamp of official action rather than of private volunteer effort, and this fact was to leave definite traces on the organisation in the Hainaut long after it had been incorporated into the national activity and reorganised under the C.R.B. and the Comité National.

Relief Activities in Brabant. In the province of Brabant is situated the city of Brussels, but, because of its importance, Greater Brussels was from the first regarded as a province to itself for the purposes of the administration of relief. In the other cities and towns of Brabant, such as Louvain, Aerschot, Tirlemont, Diest and Wavre, the work of relief made necessary by the destruction of property, and by the presence of a large number of homeless refugees, began almost as soon as in Brussels itself.

The early volunteer efforts in Louvain were probably the most remarkable for the results obtained in the face of almost superhuman difficulties of anything that was done in all Belgium in that first period of reaction to the distress and of groping for remedies. On August 26, the very day after they had seen the fairest portions of their city deliberately laid waste and reduced to smouldering ash-buried ruins, a few leading citizens came together and organised what was called a 'Comité de Notables' (a committee of prominent men). Most of the city officials, including the burgomaster, had fled or were in concealment to escape assassination. The condition of the bulk of the population was very desperate. Many were without a roof, or clothing save what they had on their backs, or food, and were without the money to obtain the very necessities of life. The Committee of Notables set resolutely to work while the ruins of the city were still smoking, and for two months succeeded in meeting the needs of the people practically without aid from the outside. The food problem was the easier solved because of the presence of considerable stocks of wheat and flour in the mills near Louvain which were turned over in part to the committee for the needs of the population of Louvain.

The Louvain committee, under the direction of M. Nerinx and other prominent men, very systematically organised its work. Two distinct commissions were formed on September 9, one to look after the administration of the city and the cleaning up of the ruins, the other to be a 'Commission de Ravitaillement.' The latter was divided into sections, each charged with a particular function, and was assisted by a 'Comité de Secours' in giving relief to the destitute. The various branches of these bodies met the situation admirably, and the problems of collecting and distributing funds, of sheltering the homeless, of clothing and feeding the destitute, of employing the idle labourers, of caring for the children, of distributing soup, food and coal, and of clearing up the debris of the city were quickly and efficiently solved.

Similar work under even more difficult conditions was undertaken by a few of the citizens of the town of Aerschot, which was even more damaged and devastated than Louvain. Here, too, the people were fed and clothed and provided with temporary shelter by the volunteer relief committee, aided by subscriptions from other places and by a subsidy of 25,000 francs from the Comité Central of Brussels.

On a lesser scale the problems of immediate relief were handled in a similar way in all the chief towns of Brabant. But for the most part their sufferings had not been so great as in Louvain and Aerschot, and the amount of immediate relief needed was less. The agricultural character of the province made it possible for most of the towns and all the villages to secure the necessary food for several months from the local stocks. The wealthy could buy for themselves and the poor were cared for by the communal administrations or by the volunteer committees. In November the food supplies were beginning to fail, but by that time imports were on the way to make up for the lack of native supplies. A provincial committee was organised to co-operate with the Comité National, regional committees were formed in all the chief places, and by December 1 the provincial organisation, assisted by its American delegate, Mr. F. W. Meert, was able to cope effectively with the problem of distributing food throughout the province.

The Relief Organisation in Limbourg.—In area Limbourg is the smallest of Belgian provinces. Its population of 280,000 lived for the most part in villages or small towns. The food shortage was consequently not felt so soon nor so acutely as in the areas of denser population. Very little relief organisation was effected before November, though the various communal administrations had taken action to care for the destitute, and soup-canteens had been established in Hasselt. In October, however, the stock of cereals began rapidly to disappear, and the city of Hasselt appealed to the American Minister for assistance. Limbourg, as a frontier province, naturally benefited somewhat from supplies smuggled from Holland, but, in spite of this, the food question had become very serious when the news came of the creation of the organisations to import provisions for all Belgium. The provincial committee was organised at the end of November, but the first shipments of food did not reach the province until the middle of December. By that time there was no bread in many communes and the distress was rapidly growing acute.

Relief Activities at Antwerp and the Flanders.—In the provinces of Antwerp and in the Flanders the Belgian army and the King's government maintained itself until the first part of October, and the conditions that had faced the rest of Belgium for two months did not appear until these provinces too were overrun by the German armies. The problem of feeding these northern areas had been taken care of by the Belgian civil and



military authorities, who requisitioned all available food-stocks and provided the municipal and communal authorities with the quantities they needed.

In Antwerp two commissions were formed, one for 'ravitailement,' the other for 'assistance.' In the first weeks of the war they extended their activities until they included the seventy-seven communes embraced within the area of the Antwerp fortifications. These commissions continued their work even after the occupation of Antwerp by the Germans and became the nucleus of the provincial committee later organised to co-operate with the Comité National.

In the Flandres the agricultural resources seemed quite ample to provide for the needs of the population. The crops had been good and the war operations in this area occurred after the harvest had been brought in. The influx of the hordes of refugees seeking shelter on the Belgian coast or across the sea in England produced serious problems, however. In the industrial centres destitution rapidly increased. The communal administrations were active and efficient and, with the aid of volunteer relief committees, were able to cope with the situation. Ghent especially, because of its greater financial resources, was able to effect many relief measures that were beyond the means of other Flemish towns. The situation was fairly well in hand until the Belgian retreat to the Yser.

The advance of the German armies was as usual marked by some destruction of property, and by wholesale requisitions of food and other supplies. The native stocks of food practically all disappeared, with the result that the need became as acute in Antwerp and Flanders in November and December as it had been for some months in the other parts of Belgium. It was not long, therefore, until the Commission and the Comité National had to intervene.

**The threat of Famine.**—Thus, in all the Belgian provinces, the Belgians themselves had struggled to avoid the food crisis brought about by the invasion. If one remembers the conditions under which they were working one cannot but be amazed at the results accomplished in those first terrible months of the war. The Belgians had to work amid the most chaotic conditions, without means of communication or of transport, at a time when all commerce had ceased and when the increasing destitution rendered unsure the security of the land. With admirable initiative, untiring energy and patriotic devotion the Belgians of all classes had combined to solve the common problem, to avert the threatened famine. Their success, great as it was, could, however, from the very nature of the situation, be only temporary. They had cared for the destitute and had postponed the crisis; they had accomplished all that was humanly possible with the resources available, in enabling Belgium to hold out until help should come from without. More they could not do.

Yet they realised, or at least their leaders did, that unless this help should come from the outside world, all their efforts, all their self-sacrifice and devotion, would have been for naught. It took no great calculation to see that a country like Belgium, dependent in normal times on imports for three-fourths of its bread, could not long exist when these imports were completely stopped, and when a large proportion of the native crops had been seized or destroyed. The problem at first attacked had been exclusively that of caring for the destitute; but, as time passed, it became a question rather of finding a way by which a sufficient percentage of the normal imports could be introduced to provide at least enough food for a minimum ration for the entire population. The

blockade had begun even in September to do its work, and it seemed that the first sufferer would not be Germany, against which it was aimed, but would be rather the small but gallant nation that had dared to fight to preserve its honour and its independence, and had paid the price for its heroic service to the allied cause by falling into the hands of the common foe.

The increasing difficulty in finding food throughout September and the first half of October had convinced the various committees in Belgium that they could not long provide the food necessary even for the destitute. The rising prices of food, and the practical disappearance of many commodities brought home to the whole population the realisation of the danger with which they were faced. Belgium was on the verge of famine, and the dread spectre of hunger began to haunt them. Behind that spectre lurked the even more terrible suggestions of the certainty of desperate revolt by a stubborn and starving population, and of savage repression by the bayonets and machine guns of the Germans.

Faced with such prospects it was but natural that the leaders of the different communities should seek means to avoid the threatened dangers, and they turned instinctively to the capital, to the neutral ministers, and to the Comité Central. The Comité Central had already aided committees in other cities with grants of money and gifts of clothing. It represented the wealthiest and the most influential elements in Belgian financial and political life. In the first weeks of October there came to Brussels delegations from Liège, Namur, Mons, Charleroi, and other places, asking the ministers to intervene to secure permission for the importation of food, and asking the Comité Central to provide the means by which such importation could be made possible. For only by such importation of the essential foods could Belgium be saved from famine.

## THE GERMAN ADMINISTRATION OF THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

The German General Government in Belgium.—The German armies, as they swept across Belgium and through Northern France, left behind them some ten million of enemy population who had to be held in check and governed. Practically the whole of the kingdom of Belgium was so occupied. In addition to the merely military problem, there was the difficulty of carrying on the government of the whole nation. The Germans very quickly devised a method of doing this. At the end of August 1914 most of the kingdom of Belgium was set apart as an occupied territory (Okkupationsgebiet), i.e. as a conquered country behind the zone of military operations. Field-Marshal Baron von der Goltz, one of the venerable figures of the German army, was appointed by the Emperor to be Governor-General in Belgium, and a general government was set up under his direction for the occupied territory in Belgium. To this occupied territory were added the French districts of Maubeuge and Givet-Fumey, which geographically form indentations into Belgium. The government set up at this time continued throughout the whole of the Commission's activities in Belgium. In order to satisfactorily explain the relations of the Commission to the German authorities it is necessary to include here a brief explanation of the method of government used by the Germans in the occupied territories. The government in the operation districts and in the so-called etappen districts, which lay between the occupied

territory of Belgium and the actual front, was completely in the hands of the commanders of the respective armies and will therefore be dealt with separately.

The Maintenance of Belgian Local Government.—Throughout Belgium the Germans adapted their administrative system so far as possible to the already existing Belgian political divisions. They endeavoured also to as great an extent as possible to maintain intact the whole structure of Belgian local government. The Belgian city and communal administrations were interfered with little, if at all, save that they were required to comply with certain general ordinances issued from time to time by the Governor-General. The Belgian police and the Belgian courts were permitted to continue in the discharge of their duties. To this day any person, except a German, committing an ordinary crime in Belgium is arrested by a Belgian policeman, tried in a Belgian court under the provisions of the Belgian laws and sentenced to a Belgian prison under the charge of Belgian jailers. It is true, of course, that at almost every stage in this process the German administration was present visibly and practically, if not officially. German sentries and police agents patrolled the streets, German agents usually attended the Belgian courts, and German soldiers guarded the jailers, as well as the jailed, in the Belgian prisons.

The Administrative Machinery set up by the Germans.—The general structure of administration set up in Belgium was two-fold. There was a military government extending to practically every commune in the country. Alongside the military government in almost every case were civil officials encharged with carrying out functions formerly performed by agents of the Belgian national government. Thus in Brussels, alongside of the General Governor and his military government was a civil administration under Dr. von Sandt, who was called Chief of the Civil Administration (Zivilverwaltung). In each province there was a military governor directly under the orders of the Governor-General. Associated with him in each province was likewise a civil government, presided over by an official having the title 'President of the Civil Administration of —— Province.' Within the province the same principle was applied to the administration of the smaller political divisions. Thus each arrondissement, called by the Germans a 'Kries,' was ruled over by a military official called the 'Krieschef.' So far as the civil government was concerned, there was in each arrondissement a civil commissioner who practically took the place of the former Belgian arrondissement commissioner. Acting under the orders of each Krieschef were the 'Kommandants' of the various towns and villages within the arrondissement, or Kreis.

Other general Belgian services, such as the customs service, the service of tax collection, and the service of agricultural control and inspection, were maintained practically intact by the Germans. Though their operations were strictly supervised and commissioners of the German Government had to *visé* every order that went out, the Germans maintained the pretext that the Belgians were still administrating their own services. The post and the railways were, of course, taken over by the Germans and run as military institutions. Later on, when a postal service was opened to the Belgian public, most of the former postal employees went back to work for the Germans in collecting, forwarding and distribution of mail.

Laws and Tribunals in Belgium.—The Germans continued in force practically the whole of the Belgian law, but claimed and exercised the right to eliminate by decree such provisions or groups of laws as displeased them, or to make new legislation by simple decree of the Governor-General. In addition to this body of Belgian law, as amended by

the Governor-General, there was also in force in Belgium a complete code of military law and a complete set of military tribunals to enforce that law. The Belgian courts from the first refused absolutely to recognise the validity of any changes in the existing law made by the Germans. Any violations of a decree made by the Germans was therefore tried, not in the Belgian courts, but in the German military tribunals, along with all other charges of violations of military law. This has its important bearing because later on, when the Governor-General reserved the cereal crops to the use of the population by decree, farmers who violated the provisions of the decree could only be tried in the German courts. For this reason they were apt to escape detection, because the Belgian committees hesitated to bring any charge against a man that would involve trial in a military court.

**Administrative Departments of the General Government.**—The General Government was divided into many sections and departments. There was a political department under the head of Baron von der Lancken, who bore the title of Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Governor-General in Belgium. There were special departments to look after nearly every branch of Belgian industry, commerce and agriculture. There were commissioners of banks who, through local inspectors, kept a close eye on all financial operations. There soon came to be a central coal control office which supervised and regulated the coal-mining industry in Belgium. There were central offices for the control of the canals and a central military railroad office. So far as possible the Germans attempted to establish administrative agencies to supervise all activity of every kind in Belgium. But this does not purport to be a complete description of the German administration, and the illustrations mentioned are sufficient to indicate the methods by which the Germans controlled Belgium.

**The Powers and Policies of the Governor-General.**—Von der Goltz from the first was inclined to adopt a policy of conciliation toward the Belgians, as was indicated in his famous proclamation of September 2, when he declared that no Belgian would ever be required to do anything repugnant to his patriotic instincts. But von der Goltz, who gave the first guarantees to the Commission, only remained in Belgium a little over three months and was then succeeded by General von Bissing, who held office until his death in April 1917. General von Falkenhausen was then appointed Governor-General in Belgium. The Governor-General in Belgium was a direct personal representative of the Kaiser, a sort of Viceroy. He was independent of the Imperial Government in Berlin, save as he chose to heed the recommendations and instructions from Berlin. He was also nominally free from dictation by the General Staff, although the close association of the Kaiser with his General Staff usually compelled the Governor-General to follow the instructions of the supreme army command. Von Bissing was inclined to be just and moderate in his administration. He was constantly attacked by violent German imperialists because of his moderation. German officers repeatedly said to the delegates of the Commission in Northern France that von Bissing was altogether too kind-hearted, and that the Germans should have some man of sterner stuff in Belgium who would make the people feel the war and realise to the full the advantages of being governed by Germans. Von Bissing, for example, was undoubtedly opposed to that practical enslavement of the Belgian population which aroused the indignation of the civilised world in 1916. This appears to have been carried out by the General Staff over von Bissing's head and against his judgment. Von Bissing, like all other German army leaders, was a martinet where military regulations were concerned, and was often difficult to deal with for this reason, but his point of view was liberal, and

in general the Commission was able, though usually it is true only after considerable negotiation, to obtain from him the guarantees necessary for the continuation of its existence.

**Restrictions of Circulation and Passport Regulations.**—One of the chief difficulties encountered by the Commission and the Comité National was that of securing passports for their members and representatives. When the relief work was begun, military passes were required whenever one journeyed from one commune to another. Pass-bureaux were established, not only in the chief centres of each province, but also in every village where there was an *orts-kommandantur*. Consequently, whenever any Belgian wanted to make a journey, it was necessary to have a special military pass. The difficulties of trying to carry out a nation-wide food-distribution under such conditions are obvious. In March 1915, however, the rule was changed, and it was provided that anyone in possession of a certificate of identity issued by the Belgian communal authorities and stamped by a German pass-office, could travel freely within the occupation zone without an additional military passport. This rule continued in force until the end of the activity of the Americans in Belgium, although certain restrictions were made in 1916 which practically made it impossible for men of military age in Belgium, who were all required to register at special German registry offices, to travel without a very special pass. In a later chapter the Commission's negotiations to secure passports for its own delegates and for the members of the Comité National to travel in automobiles will be discussed.

**Means of Communication and Travel.** The difficulty of communications was not solved, however, when the necessary passports were secured. It still remained to find a means of conveyance. Most of the Belgian automobiles had been requisitioned, and even those who still had their cars were forbidden to use them. The Commission was able to secure a certain number of Belgian cars for itself and for the Comité National and obtained the necessary authorisation to use these. But the number of automobiles that could be used was strictly limited, and all the routine work within the provinces had to be carried on by other means of communication. The trams were permitted to re-begin their service in the fall of 1914. The vicinal tramway system of Belgium is very highly developed and nearly all parts of the country were connected by the tram-lines. These travel very slowly, however, and were a rather uncertain means of conveyance. Members of provincial committees desiring to attend a noonday meeting of the committees were often obliged to catch a tram before daybreak and to spend many weary hours journeying to their destination. The Germans opened up the railroads to civilian travel after a few months, but the number of trains was limited and the time made was almost as slow as that of the tramways. Many Belgians also, from patriotic motives, objected to using the railroads, as they contended that the fares they paid were a direct contribution to the German Government. Gradually, however, the means of travel became improved and, after a few months of work, the relief organisations found little difficulty in keeping up their communications between the various committees.

**The Administration of the Territory held by the Active Armies.**—So much for the occupied district. In the districts under the jurisdiction of the operating armies the situation was very different. On the western front, from Verdun to the North Sea, there were six German armies,\* each with practically independent organisation and initiative, bound together only by the superior authority of the supreme army command and the

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\* In 1917 and again in 1918 the German armies were reorganised and re-arranged, but the districts for food distribution purposes remained practically unchanged.

general staff. Each army was practically left free to deal with the problems of governing the civil population as it saw fit. There was, however, a certain similarity of organisation. The territory held by the armies was divided into two areas: the operation zone, which extended an average distance of twenty kilometres behind the actual front lines, and the *etappen* zone, which included all the territory between the operation zone and the occupied district in Belgium, or the German frontier, as the case might be.

The Government of the *Etappen* Districts.—Each army had for the government of the *etappen* zone an army inspection, presided over by a general under the orders of the commander of the army concerned. The territory of each army inspection was divided up into districts best suited to the military organisation, which were called *etapes*. Each *etape* included a number of communes, varying from one to fifty according to the character of the region and the density of the population. Each *etape* was ruled over by an officer detailed for this purpose. The *etappen* commandants were usually retired officers, volunteer officers over the age of active service, or younger officers who had been badly wounded, and were put in these posts because of their unfitness for active service. In every village within the jurisdiction of each *etape* were *orts-commandants*. In towns of any size the commander of the place would be a captain or lieutenant, but in the smaller places the commander was usually an under-officer.

The *etappen* district of each army was governed by regulations drawn up by the army inspection and administered by the *etappen* commandants and the *orts-commandants* under their command. These regulations covered every imaginable subject: some of them prescribed the restrictions imposed upon the population; some related to special taxes to be levied; some dealt with espionage and threatened lurid penalties for any acts committed by the population against their temporary rulers; others were designed to husband the resources still possessed by the population for the ultimate benefit of the army. The population were informed that the German army considered itself the proprietor of all currency, securities, machinery, food and livestock within the areas occupied by the army.\* The population were required to make exact returns to the local commandants of everything they possessed, and the Germans took from them what they wanted, in exchange for a *bon de requisition*, which was nothing more than a receipt for the taking of the property. Such a regime was obviously a very hard one for the people who had to live under it, and tremendously different from the comparative *laissez-faire* policy followed in the territory of the General Government.

In the *etappen* districts the people were not allowed to move outside their own communes, and any sort of communication from one commune to another was strictly forbidden and violations sternly punished. Practically all of the men in the French *etappen* regions who were of military age were taken by the Germans as prisoners of war, on the pretext that they were mobilisable, and were put in internment camps, often near the front, and made to work for the Germans, cutting down trees, running saw-mills, building and repairing roads and railroads and working in the fields. It must be said that in the *etappen* districts most of the commandants were comparatively well disposed toward the population. They were, for the most part, men of mature years and of liberal professions in ordinary life. Many of them sincerely regretted having to enforce many of the orders sent them from the army inspection. Of course there were exceptions to this

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\* This was the actual phraseology used in a proclamation of the Commander of the Champagne-Ardenne army.

rule, and very numerous ones. The *orts-commandant* and the *etappen commandant* could be practically as much of a tyrant as he pleased, as he had the power of life and death over the whole of the civil population under his command. Many Germans, who themselves had been sternly disciplined while serving in the army, took a mean pleasure in being able to give rather than to obey orders, to bully rather than to be bullied. But in any event, no matter how considerate a commandant, life in an *etappen* place was inclined to be a very unhappy one for the population, cut off from all contact with the world and with their neighbours and having nothing to occupy their minds but the eternal questions, 'How long will it last?' 'When will we be free?' On the whole the people in the French *etappen* districts probably suffered more than those in the Flanders, because, in the case of the Flemish populations, the Germans always made considerable concessions in the hope of winning over the sympathy and voluntary support of these 'lost German brothers,' as the Germans liked to call them. Every effort was made to persuade the Flemish that their real interests identified them with Germany rather than with the Western Powers.

The Administration of the Operations District.—The population who found themselves in the worst situation of all were those living near the front in the districts of actual operations. Here the villages were overrun by thousands of passing troops, going to and from the trenches. Absolute military law prevailed, without any of the mitigations that existed even in the *etappen* zone. There were no permanent village commandants. The superior officer of the troops that happened to be billeted in a village was, for the time being, the commander of that place. The population, so far as their own interests or rights were concerned, simply did not exist in the minds of the active army. The army took what it wanted and remade the villages according to its whims, to serve as billeting places for the troops. Visitors in this region close to the front, after the Germans had been in occupation for a certain time, might often believe themselves to be in a German place. The houses were decorated by the Germans in accordance with their own particular taste, and gardens were built about them with the neat little rustic fences and benches and conventional ornaments dear to the German's heart. Cinemas, music-halls, beer-halls, recreation gardens, athletic grounds, bathing-places were added to the village. The civilian population of these villages were simply dispossessed and were lucky if they were left a cellar in which to sleep. In addition to all that they suffered from their conquerors, many of these villages were within the reach of the long-range guns of the Allies and were frequently shelled or bombed by aeroplanes. A truly unhappy situation, to be dominated by one's conquerors and bombarded by one's fellow-citizens!

Much has been written, and will continue to be written, about the activities of the Germans in the occupied territories, but this is not the place to enter into an extended discussion of such a matter. It has been necessary, however, in order to give some little indication of conditions under which people were living in the territory occupied by the German armies, to add this brief sketch of the general methods used by the Germans in governing them.

The Conditions under which the Relief Work was carried on.—The work of relief in Belgium and in Northern France can never be fully appreciated unless one has constantly in mind the situation in which the ten million people living in those areas found themselves and the conditions under which the feeding and clothing of these people had to be carried on. The sufferings of the people of the occupied districts and the tremendous difficulties that had to be met and overcome by the relief organisations cannot be too

strongly emphasised. The atmosphere in all the occupied territories was that of a prison. One felt that even the privileges one was allowed to enjoy were due to the whims of a tyrant rather than to the benevolent purpose of a just ruler. Life was one succession of uncertainties. One never knew from one week to another what the next day might bring forth, what new restrictions, what new exactions might be imposed upon the community. Always, too, there was the undying hope that during the next week or the next month the Germans would be hurled back to their own frontiers. One of the most pathetic elements of the situation was this unswerving hope and forced optimism. Without it, however, the people could probably have never survived the four years of foreign rule and remained at the end unbroken in spirit and healthy in mind and body. The cutting off of all normal means of transmitting news hurled the population back twenty centuries or more, to the times when all the news was passed by word of mouth. People seldom believed what they saw printed in the authorised newspapers. They showed great ingenuity in smuggling in from the outside French and English papers and in passing these from hand to hand throughout the community. Uncensored papers like the famous *La Libre Belgique* were printed clandestinely and widely circulated. The wildest rumours flew from mouth to mouth and village to village with incredible rapidity. The people were ready to believe anything, if the rumour was of the sort to give new hope to them. It was in such an atmosphere of absolute rule by a foreign foe, of the enforcement of military discipline upon a population long accustomed to extreme individual liberty, of uncertainty as to the future and what it would bring forth, of the spreading of wild rumours, of bitter hate and of credulous optimism, that the work of the Commission for Relief in Belgium was to be done.



## CHAPTER II

THE FORMATION OF THE COMMISSION FOR RELIEF  
IN BELGIUMTHE SHALER MISSION:  
THE FIRST ATTEMPT TO IMPORT FOOD INTO BELGIUM

**First attempt to Import Supplies.**—From the first week of the activities of the Comité Central the necessity of securing imports of food to keep the Brussels canteens supplied had been realised. Heinemann had had in mind, when he suggested the advisability of securing the patronage of the Ministers of the United States and of Spain for the Comité Central, the possibility of obtaining such imports through diplomatic intervention. At this time, the beginning of September, there was no thought of making any very large or even any continuous importation. It was proposed only to attempt to obtain a few thousand tons to provide soup and bread for the immediate needs of the poor of Brussels. The Executive Committee at its meeting of September 3 had approved Heinemann's suggestion, and had authorised him to get in touch with the German authorities, either directly or through Burgomaster Max, and seek to gain permission to import food supplies from Holland or England. At this time Antwerp and the Belgian coast was still held by the Belgian armies. Any introduction of food would be difficult, therefore, and would have to be made via Maastricht and Liège.

Through Burgomaster Max, the Executive Committee of the Comité Central immediately entered into negotiations with the German Governor of Brussels to obtain the necessary immunity from seizure for their supplies from abroad, permits of importation, and a passport for Holland for Millard Shaler, who was delegated by the sub-committee to make the purchases and import the food supplies. Van Bree, the Secretary of the Executive Committee, conferred with Shaler on September 7 about the matter, and at a meeting of the Committee on September 10 announced that Shaler was willing to undertake the purchases on behalf of the Comité Central. On September 7, also, Burgomaster Max wrote Major-General von Luttwitz, Military Governor of Brussels, for the permits and passports necessary, stating that it was proposed to purchase 500 tons of flour and 100 tons each of beans, peas and rice. Having received no response to this first letter, Max wrote again on September 12, stating the urgency of the matter, and that it would probably be necessary to make the purchases in England.\*

In the meantime Heinemann and Shaler had taken up the matter with Dr. Kaufmann of the civil administration of the General Government, and had been assured that the General Government approved the plan and would aid it as much as circumstances permitted. Kaufmann also promised to take up the matter with the military authorities with a view to getting the necessary authorisations. On September 13 von Luttwitz,

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\* These letters are given in Heinemann's Memo., pp. 25-26.

replying to Max, stated that military conditions made it impossible to bring food to Brussels via Antwerp or the Belgian coast; that the only way to import supplies was via Holland and Germany; and that he was prepared to transmit Max's request to the competent authorities if the Comité Central wished to make the importation through this channel. Kaufmann had meanwhile received from Heinemann a memorandum explaining the organisation and purposes of the Comité Central, and setting forth the imperative necessity of securing importations of food from outside Belgium, in view of the extreme insufficiency of the indigenous stocks. In this memorandum it was stated that the Comité Central intended, not only to aid the poor of Brussels, but also to lend assistance to the similar relief committees that had come into existence in the other Belgian communities. In order to be able to do this, however, it was 'unconditionally necessary that food should be imported from abroad, that is, from Holland and England.' Such importation would be impossible without definite assurances that the food imported would be free from all requisition by the military. The German authorities should provide signed and stamped placards to be affixed to all wagons and lighters, certifying that the goods were not subject to seizure or requisition. The military authorities should permit and facilitate the shipment of this food via rail, canal or road, and should issue passports to Shaler and his assistant to permit them to go to Holland and England to make the purchases. The quantities to be purchased mentioned in this memorandum were: Flour 2,000-4,000 tons; beans and peas 400-600 tons; and rice 300-400 tons.

**The First German Permits and Guarantees.**—The civil administration urged the military governors to approve the proposals. Finally, after some days of interviews and correspondence, Messrs. Heinemann and Shaler were received on September 15 by Major-General von Luttwitz. He assured them of his approval, and stated that he would have the necessary authorisations made out at once. He had already written to Burgomaster Max in a second letter, dated September 15, that the General Government would permit all food bought in Holland to be imported, and that the Dutch Government had announced that it would permit such shipments to be exported from the Netherlands.\* The Governor-General, Baron von der Goltz, writing Whitlock on September 17, also gave definite assurances that the 'German Government agrees not to lay any tax on, nor to requisition, nor seize, any supplies imported by the Comité Central for the needs of the civil population.' He stipulated, however, that the civil administration of the German Government 'reserves the right of decision as to the distribution of wheat and flour in the different parts of the country, according to the needs.†'

On September 19 Shaler received from von Luttwitz a permission to import the supplies he should purchase. 'The transport of provisions which are intended . . . for the destitute people of Brussels is hereby approved in principle. But I beg to remark that, during the period of military operations in Belgium, *the use of the canals is forbidden, the use of motor-cars is dangerous, and the use of the railroads under restricted conditions is liable to great delay.*' Truly not a very comforting assurance! Von Luttwitz also asked Heinemann and Shaler to prepare the placards for the protection of the supplies, stating that he would have them signed and stamped. The text of these placards as prepared by the Comité Central and approved by von Luttwitz, stated that: 'By order of the German Military Governor the foodstuffs and necessities destined to assure the provisioning of the

\* Percy's collection of guarantees.

† Percy's collection of guarantees.

destitute in the Brussels district shall neither be requisitioned nor seized by the German troops.'

**Shaler's Mission.**—Shaler's passport, received at the same time, gave him and his assistant, Mr. Couchman, permission to go to Holland via Namur and Liège, and to import foodstuffs within a period of a month, that is, until October 20.\* The Comité Central had provided him with a credit of £20,000 (500,000 francs), and had instructed him to buy foodstuffs at the lowest possible price, as they were to be used solely in providing the rations of bread and soup for distribution to the destitute of Brussels. He was to proceed to Holland and thence to England, where he was to get into touch with prominent Belgians, among others M. Edgar Sengier, of the Banque Belge pour l'Étranger, in order to arrange, in co-operation with the Belgian Minister, for the formation in London of a sub-committee of the Comité Central to raise funds to make further purchases for the poor of Brussels. The quantities of food to be purchased were specified: Flour 500–2,000 tons, beans and peas, 100 tons; and rice, 100–200 tons; the quantity and proportion depending on the price.

Shaler left Brussels on September 20, and proceeded via Namur and Liège by motor-car to Holland. In Liège he was held up—under arrest—and made to stand trial before the Military Court of the Liège Commandantur. Consequently, though released when his credentials were verified, he did not reach Rotterdam until September 25. He immediately called on the American Minister, Dr. Henry van Dyke, and explained his mission. Van Dyke sent Marshall Langhorne, Secretary of the Legation, to introduce Shaler to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and to endorse his proposals. The Minister was very well disposed, but told Shaler that, in view of the shortage of available food even in Holland, the Netherlands Government would prefer to have him make the purchases in England. Shaler therefore proceeded immediately to London and got in touch with prominent Belgians, and—what was to have the utmost consequences—with some of his American friends in London, chiefly mining engineers. On September 28 van Dyke telegraphed him from The Hague the official reply from the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the effect that 'the Netherlands Government has no objection to permitting Mr. Shaler to purchase supplies in Holland, but, as all foodstuffs are needed here, it is preferred that he buy his supplies in England. Arrangements have already been made to ship them through Holland in transit to Belgium.' †

**Negotiations in London.**—On September 29 Shaler went with M. Sengier and other Belgians to the Belgian Legation, to ask aid in securing permits to export the supplies to be purchased in England, and to discuss the project of forming a sub-committee in London to raise funds to aid the Comité Central. They were received by M. Prella de la Nieppe, who promised to take up the matter with the Count de Lalaing, the Belgian Minister. The following day Shaler was advised that the Minister was loath to act without definite instructions from his government, and that in any case it was bad policy to form a new committee for Belgian relief in England, because there were already so many appeals for aid to Belgians. The Minister, however, would take up the matter with the Belgian Government with a view to getting a large appropriation from the Belgian Relief Fund, which amounted to many hundreds of thousands of pounds.

On October 1 Shaler received a new and most effective support in his negotiations.

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\* These passports and authorisations are annexed to Shaler's report to the Comité Central.

† Quoted in Shaler's report to the Comité Central.

Hugh Gibson, the Secretary of the American Legation at Brussels, arrived in London from Brussels with messages from Whitlock to Ambassador Page. Gibson is a most energetic and capable diplomat, and one who does not permit red tape to stand in the way of needed action. With his arrival on the scene affairs began to progress more rapidly. On the very day of his arrival he went with Shaler to the Belgian Legation. This time they were received by the Minister himself. Gibson and Shaler explained the situation in Brussels, and the purpose of Shaler's mission, and gave the Minister a memorandum of the proposed purchases and of the permits needed from the British Government. The Minister was favourably disposed, but wished authority from his government before acting. Gibson therefore immediately telegraphed the American Consul in Antwerp, asking him to see the Belgian Foreign Minister (the Belgian Government being still in Antwerp), and to ask him to instruct the Minister in London to take up the matter with the British Foreign Office. Gibson in the telegram emphasised the urgency of the situation, stating that 'food supplies in Brussels are practically exhausted and immediate action is imperative.'

The necessary instructions were apparently at once transmitted to the Count de Lalaing, for he sent Shaler's memorandum to the Foreign Office with a request for immediate action. On October 5 Mr. Wildbore Smith, of the Board of Trade, informed him verbally that the Board would permit food to be sent to Brussels on the guarantee of the German authorities to respect such imports, provided the shipment was made by the American Ambassador in London to the American Minister in Brussels, and that the distribution in Belgium should be supervised by the latter. This information was promptly transmitted by the Belgian Legation to Ambassador Page in a letter of October 6.

**The Intervention of American Diplomats.**—Gibson, during his brief visit to London, gave to Page a full account of the situation in Brussels, and keenly interested him in the effort to relieve the distress prevailing in Belgium. Page felt, however, that he could not, on his personal responsibility, take action that would involve extending the protection of his government to supplies shipped into Belgium. He therefore immediately telegraphed the State Department, presenting the facts of the situation as he had learned them from Shaler and Gibson, and mentioning the permission of the British Government, conditional on the supervision of the shipments by the diplomatic representatives of the United States. He added that if the State Department were willing to authorise him to take this action, they should obtain a definite assurance from Berlin of the German Government's approval. The State Department on October 7 cabled Gerard giving the facts mentioned by Page, and asked Gerard to request the Imperial German Government to give its approval to the plan, and to confirm the assurances already given by the General Government in Brussels. On October 13 Gerard informed Page that he had placed the matter before the German Foreign Office with a request for immediate action. The reply was delayed for some days, but on October 17 Gerard telegraphed Page of the approval by Berlin of the relief plan, and two days later Page and Whitlock received from the State Department the authorisation to extend their patronage to the work of shipping supplies into Belgium. The diplomatic framework for the work of relief in Belgium was thus erected. It still remained, however, to arrange the practical details and to create organisations to carry on that work successfully and in a way commensurate with the needs.

## HERBERT HOOVER AND HIS PLAN FOR AN AMERICAN COMMISSION TO AID BELGIUM

**Herbert Hoover and the American Relief Committee in London.**—Ambassador Page, on receiving the message from the Belgian Legation that the British Government would allow food to go into Belgium only under the supervision of American diplomats in London and Brussels, had at once turned for counsel to a man whose ability, energy and resourcefulness he had already come to recognise. In the first troubled weeks of the war, when Americans were tumbling frantically into England from all parts of the Continent in their scramble to get away from the war, a committee of Americans, resident in London, had been formed to care for their stranded fellow-citizens. Herbert Clark Hoover had been the chairman of this committee. Universally recognised in mining and financial circles as the foremost American mining engineer in London, Hoover had been but little known outside of his profession. Behind him lay a career of distinguished attainment in many parts of the world. Wherever his trail had led him, in Stanford University as a student, in Australia, China and Burma as a director of mining enterprises, in London as a consulting expert and organiser, he had won success and had compelled attention. The admirable organisation of the American Relief Committee in London, which, from its headquarters at the Savoy Hotel, gave assistance to many thousands of Americans on their way home in August and September, 1914, was in no small degree due to his genius for organisation and his executive ability. Now he was to turn his talents to a new field, and his success in the direction of the Belgian relief work for the next four years was to make his name and ability universally known. An unknown man in 1914, in 1917 he was generally recognised as the man needed by the United States to take over the difficult and important task of administering the vast food resources of that republic.

The work of the American Relief Committee had practically come to a close by the end of September. The flood of Americans had passed, and the committee was relieved of most of its duties. Some of the money collected for American relief remained unexpended, and small grants had been made to various funds for the relief of Belgian refugees. When Shaler arrived in London on September 26 he had gone at once to some of his friends among the American engineers in London to enlist their aid for his project to send food into Belgium. One of these engineers, Edgar Rickard, took him to Hoover, with the assurance that, if anyone could help him, Hoover was the man. Hoover was much interested in the story of conditions then prevailing in Belgium, and promised to help if any means could be devised to send in relief.

**Hoover's Plan for Relief to Belgium.**—After thinking over the matter for a few days, Hoover went to see Ambassador Page on October 10. At this meeting the idea of the Commission for Relief in Belgium first took tangible form. No exact reports are extant of what was actually said. Ambassador Page, in a recent speech, however, gave an account of what happened.\* He had not known Hoover before the organisation of the American Relief Committee at the Savoy Hotel. He had observed the efficient work of this committee, and 'afterwards it began to dawn upon him that the man who had rendered such remarkable service in organising this committee was Mr. Hoover. One day that gentleman called upon him and said he was thinking of trying to help the Belgians to get

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\* Dr. Page's speech at the 2nd Annual Meeting of the National Committee for Relief in Belgium, June 15, 1917.

food, and asked whether if he and his friends undertook that work and needed some diplomatic assistance they could rely on his [Page's] help.\* Hoover pointed out that much relief work was already being done for the Belgian refugees, that the situation of the Belgians who had remained in their country was much more desperate than that of the refugees, and that Americans might be able to render great service because of their neutral position by concentrating their Belgian relief efforts on some scheme to provide food for the Belgians in Belgium.

**Ambassador Page approves.**—Ambassador Page approved heartily of the plan, and promised to render all possible assistance. In the following days when various Belgian delegations called on him to ask aid in seeking to send food into Belgium he referred them all to Hoover, with the advice that Hoover was the man to help them.

In the days that followed Hoover was working actively on his plan to organise an American committee to send food into Belgium. He found many of his associates of the American Relief Committee—men like Col. Millard Hunsiker, Edgar Rickard and John B. White—willing to aid him in the new relief undertaking. He had several interviews with Belgian delegations and with representative Belgians in England. With Mr. Shaler he sketched out tentatively a plan to realise his scheme.

**Hoover's Proposals for American Aid to Belgium.**—After further consultations with Mr. Shaler and his London colleagues, Mr. Hoover was able to propose a definite plan to the Ambassador on October 12. Nothing had yet been heard from Washington in answer to Page's telegram of the 6th inst., but assuming that the American Government would approve the plan for relief in Belgium, Hoover suggested that all funds raised in America for the aid of the Belgians should be concentrated and devoted to the feeding of the civil population in Belgium, and that an American committee be authorised by the diplomatic representatives to act as the agency to centralise, disburse and administer all funds so raised, and to transport to Belgium and there distribute the food to be obtained. Page at once approved the plan, and asked Hoover to assume the responsibility of organising and directing the proposed committee. It was agreed that this committee, set up under the patronage of American diplomats, could, through these patrons, establish informal diplomatic relations with the various belligerent governments and could negotiate and carry out whatever guarantees should be imposed by the allied governments as a condition to the work of the committee. It was also agreed that the best way to collect funds and to arouse public opinion to bring moral pressure upon the belligerents in the interest of the Belgian people would be a systematic press campaign. Hoover undertook to start this. Hoover also suggested that the committee being formed in London should be consolidated with the American committee in Brussels, of which Mr. Heinemann was chairman, and that Mr. Heinemann should be asked to assume charge of the actual work of distribution in Belgium as vice-chairman of the committee.

**Patchin's Dispatches to the New York Tribune.**—The question of publicity was of the utmost importance. The attention of America and of the allied and neutral peoples had to be called in an emphatic way to the situation in Belgium, and to the possibility of saving from the greatest imaginable calamities that small nation whose courageous fight against its invader had aroused universal admiration, and whose sad fate had been the occasion of equally universal sympathy. Shaler had already inspired the London

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\* *Morning Post*, June 16, 1917.

correspondent of the New York *Tribune*, Mr. Philip S. Patchin, into sending several cable dispatches to the *Tribune* about the situation in Belgium and the object of his mission. On September 29 Patchin wired an interview with Shaler, explaining his mission and telling how desperate was the food situation in Belgium. On October 6 a second dispatch told of the permission of the British Government for importation of food into Belgium, provided the American Ambassador in London and the Minister in Brussels would take over the responsibility of protecting it and of supervising its distribution.

As the days passed and no news came from Washington, Shaler and his associates in London grew impatient of the delay. Urgent dispatches were sent to the New York *Tribune* on October 10 and 12 by Patchin, protesting against the inaction of the government. Thus it was stated that 'the answer of Washington to the urgent request for instructions from Ambassador Page, asking whether a large purchase of food supplies for the needy of Brussels could be consigned by Mr. Page to the American Minister at Brussels, is awaited with some impatience, as late advices say the food situation is getting desperate. Brussels probably lacks bread now.' \*

**Pressure brought to bear on Washington.**—Two days later a second dispatch was published in the *Tribune* under the headline, 'U.S. Red Tape Starves Brussels,' in which Shaler was quoted as saying that the food-shortage was threatening famine in Brussels which could only be averted by shipments from without the country. 'Nearly a week ago the American Embassy here presented the matter to the State Department, which thus far has been unable to furnish a definite answer about permitting shipments through American sources outside diplomatic channels. It has been reported that Washington awaits an answer from Germany, to whom the matter was referred. Either the State Department should take action on its own initiative or should insist on Germany giving a speedy and definite answer. It is no exaggeration to say that thousands of lives depend on immediate action. . . . It is not only a matter of feeding scores of thousands of hungry people, but it is also a question of keeping the population from the consequences which usually accompany starvation. For it is quite possible that hunger-mad people will commit some overt act which will cause the German authorities to take drastic action.' Shaler said he had authority to ship 1,500 tons, 'but there is no way of getting it into Belgium until diplomatic red tape is cut. The American Government owes it from reasons of pure humanity to insist that Germany take favourable action, or to make shipments through American diplomats whether Germany agrees or not. I am certain Germany will agree if pressed, for the local military commanders already have granted immunity from seizure.' †

**Hoover enlists the aid of Ben Allan and the Associated Press.**—When Hoover began to occupy himself actively with Mr. Shaler's scheme, he was able to secure a great amount of publicity for the movement to send relief to Belgium. He had come into close touch with the London correspondents of American papers and of the Associated Press through his work on the American Relief Committee. This now proved of great service. He had only to explain the project he had in mind to gain their approval and support. Already America had shown in no uncertain way her sympathy for Belgium's sufferings. Americans were ready and willing to hear the story of Belgium. Any items about Belgium made good copy for the press. One of the representatives of the Associated Press in

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\* New York *Tribune*, October 11, 1914.

† New York *Tribune*, October 13, 1914.

London, Ben S. Allan, like Hoover a graduate of Stanford, got the permission of Melville Stone to press the Belgian cause, and for over two years he rendered invaluable services to Belgium. He became himself a member of the Commission and sent out almost daily dispatches dealing with its work.

**The Dispatch of October 15.**—The first announcement of the projected American organisation for relief in Belgium was published widely throughout the world on October 15. An Associated Press dispatch gave an interview with Hoover, in which he outlined the problem and his plan for its solution. Hoover commented on the necessity of centralising all funds collected outside Great Britain for Belgian relief, to be expended under the direction of persons familiar with the existing conditions in Belgium, for the purpose of providing relief for the civil population remaining in Belgium. All workers should combine into one commission which would embrace the committees already established in Belgium and at London. One interesting feature of the interview, in illustration of the scope of the work of the commission Hoover was planning, was the suggestion that the best way to aid the Belgian refugees would be to repatriate them. ‘The work of repatriation could only be undertaken by an American organisation which would receive not only the co-operation of the allied governments, but also of the German Government. . . . Such repatriation would be not only the best thing that could be done for the Belgians themselves, but it would relieve the other governments concerned.’ This suggestion was never acted upon; under the conditions existing it was impracticable, but it is none the less interesting as an indication of the ideas Hoover had at the time of this possible extent of the work of this proposed commission.

**Details of the Commission’s Organisation arranged.**—While this press campaign was being initiated, Hoover was engaged in constant conferences with his colleagues, planning the organisation of the American Commission for Relief in Belgium. Arrangements were made for purchasing supplies in England and for shipping them to Holland for reshipment to Belgium, as soon as the American Government would authorise the work. On October 16 Hoover and Shaler had another interview with Ambassador Page to discuss details of the organisation of the Commission. Page had learned from Brussels that Hugh Gibson was on his way to London with Baron Lambert and Franconi to negotiate for permits to send food into Belgium. Hoover decided to await the arrival of the Belgian delegation before formally launching the Commission. In any event the lack of any reply from Berlin or Washington made immediate shipments on the permits already promised by the Board of Trade impossible.

**The announcement of the Commission’s Plans.**—In an Associated Press dispatch of October 17 the plan of organisation of the Commission was outlined. According to this dispatch: “There has been initiated here and referred to Washington a comprehensive organisation 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. Ambassador Page has put the proposal to President Wilson, also to Brand Whitlock, Minister to Belgium, who, with Ambassador Page would head the committee.

‘It is believed that such a committee would furnish the solution of an exceedingly difficult and important question—getting supplies to Brussels. Washington could undoubtedly get the sanction of all the governments concerned, thus arranging for the best facilities for shipments. If supplies are shipped under the official protection of



America, obstacles on the part of the belligerents, who might fear a diversion of the supplies to the armies, would be obviated.' It was stated further that such a committee might be able to undertake the repatriation of the Belgian refugees and thus solve a very difficult relief problem. In any event the Commission would 'concentrate and systematise the expenditure of the Belgian Relief Funds now being gathered in America. Ambassador Page has consulted Herbert C. Hoover, head of the American Relief Committee here, which has done such valuable work with splendid organisation and system. Mr. Hoover would be one of the leading members of the committee, which would also include leading Americans in Brussels. Under official auspices, supplies which Belgium sadly needs could be shipped direct from America to Belgium, avoiding the necessity of obtaining export permits in London and thus saving much time.'\*

**Assurances from the British Foreign Office.**—Ambassador Page had in the meantime put himself in touch with the British Foreign Office and had received assurances that the British Government would have no objection to food supplies being sent from neutral countries in neutral ships to Rotterdam for transshipment to Belgium, if the distribution of such food would be so controlled by the American Minister in Belgium as to prevent any leakage to the Germans.

**The Commission realises its Task.**—Even before Francqui and Baron Lambert arrived in London, Hoover and Shaler and their associates in the committee had become aware of the new situation that had arisen in Belgium. From conferences with Belgian delegations, and from reports received from Belgium, it had become apparent that the problem to be faced was that of importing sufficient food, not alone for the poor of a few cities, but for the whole population of the occupied part of Belgium. The proposed commission would have to provide bread for rich and poor alike, since the cereal stocks of Belgium had become practically exhausted.

**The German Government gives its Consent.**—The arrival of a message from Ambassador Gerard, on the morning of October 18, removed the last diplomatic obstacle. Gerard wired that 'the German Government approves the plan to supply the population of Belgium with food.' The following day Lansing, Acting-Secretary of State, confirmed this message and notified Page that 'you are therefore authorised to proceed on the lines of your telegram (No. 786) of October 6.'†

When Francqui, the Baron Lambert and Hugh Gibson arrived in London on the evening of October 18 they found the ground swept clean for action. All preliminaries had been arranged. The principle of the importation of food into Belgium under American control had been agreed to by both the British and German Governments. The organisation of the American Commission to take charge of the work of centralising relief funds, purchasing and shipping supplies, and controlling distribution was practically completed. In the four days that followed, October 19–22, came an almost continuous series of meetings, the 'October conferences,' out of which sprang the Commission for Relief in Belgium and the Comité National de Secours et d'Alimentation. The machinery of the greatest relief operation in history was set to functioning. Before describing the conferences and their result, however, it is first necessary to trace the further developments in Belgium itself.

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\* *New York Times*, October 18, 1914.

† This account of the preliminaries to the organisation of the Commission is based on memorandums by Shaler, Heinemann and Hoover, on the published reports of the C.R.B. and the C.N., and on correspondence on file in the Commission's London office.

## THE EXTENSION OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMITÉ CENTRAL

**Belgium at the beginning of October.**—During the early part of October, while Shaler was seeking permission in England to send food to Belgium, and Hoover was planning the organisation of the Commission, the Belgian committees, anxiously concerned about the fate of their people, were making renewed efforts to avert the food shortage by establishing some method of importing supplies. Hugh Gibson, after his brief visit to London on October 1, had returned immediately via Antwerp to Brussels, making his way through the lines of the belligerents drawn about the fortress which was to fall in only a few days. To anyone else this would have been a tremendous experience; to Gibson it was merely an ordinary event, for in those early chaotic days of the war he was continually riding about Belgium in his motor-car, dashing back and forth between the Belgian and German lines, dodging battles, and occasionally getting caught in their midst. He arrived in Brussels about October 5, and was able to inform the Comité Central of the steps taken by Shaler and of the probable favourable result of the negotiations in progress. He could give no definite assurance, however, that there would be any immediate shipment of food.

**Effect of the Occupation of Antwerp by the Germans.**—On October 9 Antwerp was taken by the Germans, and before a week had passed they had occupied the greater part of Flanders and the Belgian coast. This event, sad as it was to the Belgian cause, made it possible to have food shipped directly from Holland to Brussels via the canals, and removed most of the objections the Germans had previously raised to food importations. Now that Antwerp was in their hands, their military position in Belgium was much more secure, and they could afford to be more generous in their attitude toward food importation.

**New efforts to secure Food Importations.**—A month had now passed since the Comité Central had first decided to attempt to buy food outside Belgium. No supplies had yet come in, or were even in prospect, and the end of the visible stocks was rapidly being reached. The shortage of food had come to be a very anxious question, not only in Brussels and the industrial areas of Liège and the Hainaut, but also in practically all parts of the country. Unless help could come from outside, the day was not far removed when hundreds of thousands of people would be without bread. Almost daily appeals for food came to the Comité Central from communal administrations and relief committees in many parts of Belgium. Delegations came to Brussels from Liège, Charleroi, Mons, Namur, and many other places, to ask help from the American and Spanish Ministers as well as from the Comité Central. In Liège the situation was very distressing. The local committees had secured several small shipments from Antwerp and from Holland, but these had been altogether insignificant in proportion to the needs, and there seemed to be no further prospect of even such small additions to the native stocks. The delegations from the Hainaut had received on October 3 permission from the Governor-General to import food free of requisition and to send representatives to Holland and England to make the necessary arrangements. They had been informed by the Belgian Minister at The Hague, however, that no food could be obtained in Holland. They had written the Belgian Minister at The Hague on October 4 that 'The situation becomes more and more critical, we have only grain and flour enough for a few days. We can hardly be able to continue for a fortnight to provide food from day to day, with even the utmost effort, for the 800,000 or 900,000 destitute people even on a half-ration. . . . On the rapidity of the solution of this question of provisionment depends the

maintenance of order and security in these populous regions. 'The lack of food will certainly drive our unhappy people to pillage and revolt.'\*

**The Country appeals to the Comité Central.**—During the last weeks of September and the first weeks of October, delegations had come almost daily to Mr. Heinemann at his office, 48 rue de Naples, to ask for aid. From every city and province came the same story. In a few weeks more no cereals would remain in the country, and the population would be without bread. The appeals became more desperate as time went on. Burgomasters declared they had not an ounce of flour remaining, and that the population was menaced with famine. Mr. Heinemann became more and more impressed with the necessity of extending the activities of the Comité Central over the whole of Belgium, and of obtaining from abroad by some means the food that would so soon be lacking. He therefore proposed to the Executive Committee that the Comité Central extend its services to all Belgium and assume the responsibility of finding, importing and distributing food for the whole country.

**Heinemann recommends the Extension of the activities of the Comité Central.**—Heinemann from the first realised that the extension of the work of the Comité Central would be impossible unless it could be assured of large food shipments from abroad. In spite of the continued lack of any news of the outcome of the Shaler mission, Heinemann set about planning a new demand, not for a single shipment of a few thousand tons to feed the destitute of Brussels, but for a regular monthly supply sufficiently important to provide the whole population with bread and other staple foods. He laid his plan before Franqui, but did not at first succeed in convincing him of its practicability. If Shaler in a month had not been able to get 1,500 tons of food to Brussels, how could Heinemann hope to secure a monthly supply of nearly 100,000 tons? If the permits could be obtained, how could such an enormous importation be financed? Franqui therefore, at first consideration, condemned Heinemann's idea as unrealisable and energetically discountenanced it. The English Government, he said, would never consent to any such proposition.

**The Ministers approve Heinemann's proposals.**—Undaunted by Franqui's objections, Heinemann called on Minister Whitlock on October 11 and discussed the matter with him, asking him to seek the authorisation from the German authorities, and to send Hugh Gibson to London to assist a delegation of prominent Belgians to negotiate with the British Government, to lay before it the real situation in Belgium, and to convince it of the necessity of permitting food to go to Belgium to save the population from famine. Whitlock thoroughly and enthusiastically approved the plan, and the Marquis de Villalobar, interviewed later, expressed similar approval. The support of the Ministers led Franqui to withdraw his objections to the scheme for a general importation of food by the Comité Central for all Belgium. The Executive Committee decided to make new representations to the belligerent powers to secure the mutual concessions necessary to ensure the provisioning of Belgium, and on October 15 the Comité Central in a full meeting voted to send a delegation to England to negotiate with the British Government, and to extend the activities of the Comité Central in such a way as to transform it into a National Committee.

**The October 15 session of the Comité Central.**—The session of October 15 was the first general meeting of the Comité Central to be called since September 5, when the organisation was formally launched. In many respects this second meeting was even more important than the first. In September the problem was that of provisioning Greater Brussels, now

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\* Extract from a letter of October 4 signed by the burgomasters of Mons, Charleroi, Mariemont, by members of the Deputation Permanente, and by the deputies of Mons, Charleroi and Thuin.

it was a question of organising all Belgium under the Committee, and of attempting to secure the necessary imports to make possible the work of the Comité Central, now soon to become the Comité National de Secours et d'Alimentation.

**Francqui's Report and Recommendations.**—Francqui, as Chairman of the Executive Committee, presented a report of the operations of the Committee, describing the work accomplished and outlining the plans for future work. 'The food-stocks available,' said Francqui, 'are sufficient to assure the provisionment of the population of Greater Brussels in flour for a month longer, and perhaps for six weeks, if further purchases can be made in the agricultural communes. It is however certain, in any event, that the quantity of flour that can be secured in the country is altogether insufficient to meet for any considerable time the needs of the population. Our American colleagues have, therefore, entered into negotiations with the German authorities to obtain guarantees against any sort of requisition of or interference with supplies which may be imported from abroad. A special delegate of your Executive Committee, Mr. Shaler, has already gone to Holland and England to make purchases and to obtain importation permits.

'It appears indispensable to me to-day, however, that new efforts should be made in England, and our American friends think it may be possible to secure for our project the aid of our honorary presidents, the Marquis de Villalobar and Brand Whitlock. It is the more necessary to make every effort we can, as we have foreseen from the beginning that it would ultimately be necessary to extend our activity over the whole country. As a matter of fact, the misery caused by the war in all Belgium has led people of the provinces to appeal to your Committee to obtain aid. As these solicitations became more and more numerous, we advised wealthy people in each region to form relief committees on the model of that which we have organised for Brussels. We have given our patronage to these committees in authorising them to take the same name as our own, that is, "Comité de Secours et d'Alimentation de la Province de ———." We have granted relief in money or clothing in proportion to the needs of the various provinces and the resources of the local committees. . . . A study of the situation has now led us to examine the project of extending actively our aid to the whole country.

**The burden to be assumed.**—'If we decide on this extension, we must not deceive ourselves about the difficulties of the mission which will devolve upon us, and our heavy responsibility. Before assuming it we desire to have your approval. In our opinion it seems impossible for us to decline to undertake this mission, so difficult, but of so great humanitarian import. The misery in the provinces is even greater than at Brussels, and it is certain that if we allow the scattering of the efforts being made abroad to provide us with food and with charitable funds, it will be to the detriment of the common purpose. We therefore propose that you accept without reserve this task, one that is certainly an ungrateful one, but highly patriotic. If you accept our point of view, we propose to you to admit into our Comité Central the presidents of the provincial committees in order to unify our work.'

**The necessity for Aid from Abroad.**—Francqui, in discussing the problem of financing the work of importing food, recognised the necessity of aid from abroad. 'We must admit that the funds we can raise in Belgium are absolutely insufficient to meet the ever-increasing needs of the necessitous classes. We are already occupied with means of obtaining assistance from abroad. Steps have been taken to induce the Belgian Government to place at our disposition at least a part of the funds collected in England. These efforts have not thus

far succeeded, but should be renewed by those of your colleagues who will go to London to negotiate for the importation of food and supplies into Belgium. A committee has been formed in Canada, at the instigation of M. Prud'homme of the Société Générale, to obtain subscriptions, and all funds raised will be sent to London to the credit of your committee. Our American colleagues have already made an appeal, and are about to make new efforts to solicit aid in the United States. They are also occupied with organising Belgian relief committees in certain countries of South America where they have personal relations.\*

**Solvay's Address to the Comité Central.**—The President of the Comité Central, Ernest Solvay, eloquently endorsed the proposal to extend the activities of that committee. 'I said in my opening address to this committee that it appeared certain to me that the generalisation and extension of the work we were undertaking would impose itself upon us. The moment has come by force of circumstances to consider the practical execution of that which we have foreseen. . . . It is true we all hope for a speedy deliverance, and in such case the national life will resume its normal course, and will soon make unnecessary our committee, but though we are permitted to hope for this happy event, we cannot count upon it, and we ought to act as if it might be delayed beyond our prevision. . . . The Comité Central must be enlarged so as to make it a truly national body with representatives from all provinces. In this way it would become a kind of government, but a provisional one resting entirely upon good will and voluntary association.'

**Heinemann's Report.**—Heinemann, in presenting the report of his sub-committee, pointed out clearly the actual situation and told of the efforts he had made in co-operation with the American Minister to obtain permits to bring food into Belgium. If wheat could not be imported from America, famine must be expected. If the Comité Central wished to extend its activities to the provinces it was indispensable that the necessary steps should be immediately taken to secure importations. The patron Ministers had agreed to make representations to the British Government to permit Belgium to import food on condition that the German authorities should undertake a solemn engagement not to seize or interfere with the imported supplies. Heinemann said further that he believed the German authorities would readily give such an engagement, and he had already prepared the text of a guarantee to be signed by them.

M. Jean Jadot, Governor of the Banque Nationale de Belgique, remarked that to obtain the support of the Belgian Minister in England it would be necessary to keep the Belgian Government *au courant* of the Committee's activities. The Government might also be induced to give financial aid to the Committee.

**The Comité Central decides to extend its activities to all Belgium.**—The Comité Central, after this discussion, unanimously approved the plan of extending the work. It decided to invite the heads of the provincial committees already existent to become members of the Comité Central, and also to form central committees in those provinces in which a provincial committee had not yet been organised. The Executive Committee was instructed to make the necessary arrangements with the Ministers and with the German authorities. It was decided to send a delegation to London with full powers to treat with the British Government.†

In order to lose no time, Heinemann at once asked Solvay, Francqui and Janssens

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\* This refers to efforts Heinemann had already made in South America, as in Spain and Italy, to induce business associates to organise committees and subscription lists for the aid of the Comité Central.

† Minutes of Comité Central meeting of October 15, 1914

to appeal officially to the patron Ministers and to make representations to the Governor-General, in the name of the Comité Central. He offered to arrange a general conference for the following day, and to this they agreed.

**The Diplomatic Conference of October 16.**—On the morning of October 16 a meeting of the utmost importance was held at the American Legation. The German authorities had been asked to send representatives, and the Baron von der Lancken, 'Minister of Foreign Affairs' of the General Government, and Dr. Kaufmann of the Civil Administration were present at the conference. The Spanish and American Ministers and Messrs. Heinemann and Hulse also attended. All the details of the guarantee to be signed by the Governor-General as a basis of negotiations with the British Government were discussed. The German representatives authorised the sending of a delegation of Belgians to London, and promised to secure the necessary passports. They also declared that the Governor-General fully approved the plans of the Committee, and would assist in any possible way.

During the course of the interview Solvay, Francqui and Janssens arrived, and made the formal requests agreed upon. Whitlock agreed to send Hugh Gibson with the Belgian delegation to make the necessary representations in London. Francqui and the Baron Lambert had been delegated by the Comité Central to go to London in its behalf. The German representatives approved their plans, and agreed to obtain immediately the signature of the Governor-General to the guarantee against the requisition of any supplies that might be imported.

**The Guarantee of Baron von der Goltz.**—Later in the day Heinemann and Hulse called at the General Government and had a second conference with von der Lancken. The final text of the guarantee was written by Heinemann himself at the desk of Dr. Kaufmann, and shortly after the letter, signed by the Governor-General, Field-Marshal Baron von der Goltz, was sent to the Legations and to Mr. Heinemann. This guarantee, more inclusive and definite than those given in September, might be called the charter of the Comité National de Secours et d'Alimentation and of the Commission for Relief in Belgium. Without it no importation would have been possible. It was to be added to and supplemented largely, but it remained as the basic condition on which the relief work was carried on. The document is of sufficient importance to be reproduced here in translation :

'General Government in Belgium.

Brussels, *October 16, 1914.*

To the Comité de Secours et d'Alimentation,

c/o Messrs. Heinemann and Hulse,

48 rue de Naples, Brussels.

In answer to your esteemed letter of this date I have the honour to reply that I welcome with keen satisfaction the work undertaken by the Comité Central de Secours et d'Alimentation, and that I have no hesitation in giving by the present my positive and express assurance that the foodstuffs of all sorts imported by the Comité for the provisioning of the civil population of Belgium are to be exclusively reserved for the needs of that population; that consequently these foodstuffs shall be exempt from requisition on the part of the military authorities; and, finally, that they are to remain at the exclusive disposal of the Comité.

(Signed) BARON VON DER GOLTZ,

Field-Marshal.'

**The Mission of Francqui and Baron Lambert to London.**—Armed with this guarantee and imbued with boundless hopes, Messrs. Francqui and the Baron Lambert

left Brussels the same evening accompanied by Hugh Gibson. Whitlock sent a letter to Ambassador Page in London, in Gibson's care, setting forth the urgent need of relief in Belgium. He also immediately telegraphed (on October 16) to the State Department at Washington and to President Wilson personally, describing the situation in Belgium, and asking for the support of the American Government to the project for relief in Belgium.

**Whitlock's Messages to Washington.**—'A grave situation now confronts the land,' he wired the State Department. 'In normal times Belgium produces only one-sixth of the foodstuffs she consumes. Within two weeks there will be no more food in Belgium. Winter is coming on and there are thousands who are without home and without hope. Therefore it is necessary to extend this relief work to the whole of Belgium.' He described the German guarantee, and spoke of the mission to London, with the request that Ambassador Page be empowered to support the representations of the Belgian delegation. 'It is not money but food that is needed. If some appropriate means can be found to call the attention of our generous people at home to the plight of the poor in Belgium, I am sure they will send succour and relief for the winter that is drawing near. It seems to me to be a work of mercy that will touch the hearts of those who are brought to understand it, and give our people in America an opportunity to serve nobly in a high cause.'

Whitlock's personal message to the President was even more urgent in its tone. 'In two weeks,' he said, 'the civil population of Belgium, already in misery, will face starvation. In view of this fact, and at the request of the relief committee, I venture to call your attention to my telegram to the Department, dated October 16, in the conviction that your great heart will find some way by which America may help to provide food for these hungry ones in the dark days of the terrible winter that is coming on.'

**Franqui and Lambert find their way prepared.**—As has already been shown, before these messages were received, or before the Belgian delegation had reached London, the work of relief in Belgium had already been sanctioned and was under way. The Commission for Relief in Belgium, under Hoover's direction, was at the point of being organised, and the necessary permissions had already been obtained for its work. Messrs. Franqui and the Barou Lambert were able to devote themselves entirely to the problem of securing the necessary funds to start the work of importation, and of deciding on the details of the operations to be undertaken, in conferences with the Spanish and American Ambassadors and the Belgian Minister in London, and in close co-operation with Hoover and his associates of the Commission for Relief in Belgium.

#### THE OCTOBER CONFERENCES. OCTOBER 18-22, 1914.

**Herbert Hoover and Emile Franqui.**—From these conferences sprang the two organisations, the Commission for Relief in Belgium and the Comité National de Secours et d'Alimentation. Then, as later, one man stood out as the representative of each organisation. Herbert Hoover, the American, and Emile Franqui, the Belgian, were to carry for the next two and a half years the chief part of the burden of the feeding of the Belgian people. Both were keen executives; both were accustomed to handling men and affairs. In temperament and personality they were utterly different. Hoover, with his odd persuasiveness, drew men to him, and won their love and friendship and confidence. Nothing was more characteristic of the Commission for Relief in Belgium than the loyalty of the volunteer members to their chief. It was an organisation based on good will, on

the spirit of volunteer service, on the sense of pride in participating in an organisation so humanitarian in purpose, so extensive in its operations, so efficient in action. Hoover, with his characteristic modesty, always deprecated the tendency to attribute the marvellous success of the Commission's work to his own efforts. He sought to make of the Commission an institution, to set it in motion in such a way that it would not depend on any one man or group of men.

Francois was of quite a different type. A man of strong will, of dominant personality, he impressed men by his ability, led them or drove them to follow him, because they realised that in the crisis through which Belgium was passing, he was the best man to be at the helm. In a very great many respects he was the dictator of the affairs of the Comité National. It was he who largely determined its policy and directed its course even in matters of detail.

It was not the first meeting of Francois and Hoover. More than a dozen years before they had met one another in China—under most interesting circumstances. It is a great tribute to the two men that they were big enough to forget in this crisis whatever differences they may have had or whatever unpleasant memories they may have cherished. In loyal co-operation they devoted themselves heart and soul to the task before them, and to them is due the larger part of the credit for the results achieved. Not that they were always in agreement or that the relations between their respective organisations were always perfectly harmonious. It was inevitable that occasional differences of opinion should arise between two such men, in a matter so complicated, so full of ramifications as the work of relief in Belgium was ultimately to become. But there was always found a *modus vivendi*, a practical solution of every difficulty, and by mutual compromise the outward course of affairs was made to run on very smoothly.

**The Results of the Conferences.**—With practical men, who are accustomed to dealing with large affairs and with analysing the crucial points of any problem, conferences are not usually very long and are never fruitless, especially if they set to work with minds set on a common object and moved by a common purpose. Francois and Baron Lambert settled with Hoover in the first conference, on October 19, the outline of the dual organisation to be established. The American Commission was to undertake the work of centralising gift funds and supplies, of making purchases, of arranging shipping, and of supervising the distribution inside Belgium, to enforce the conditions imposed by the various belligerent governments. Francois and the Baron Lambert proposed that to co-operate with the American Commission, the Comité Central should be transformed into a Comité National, in the manner decided upon at the meeting of October 15 in Brussels. Provincial committees should act under the Comité National, and in every locality of Belgium sub-committees should be called into being to undertake the actual handling and distribution of all foods imported. Francois and Lambert had various meetings with Belgian and British officials to arrange details, and to solicit financial aid. They arranged to secure by the intervention of the Belgian Government £100,000 from the Belgian Relief Fund. They secured also a contribution of another £100,000 from the British Government.

**Official Recognition by the English Government of the plan for Relief in Belgium.**—On the same day official recognition was given the Belgian Relief work in the the House of Commons when, in answer to a question about food for Belgium, Mr. Acland of the Ministry said :



'On October 16 Marshal von der Goltz gave the United States and Spanish Ministers at Brussels a written guarantee that foodstuffs imported into Belgium by the Relief Committee, acting under their joint patronage, for the maintenance of the civil population, would not be requisitioned by the military, but would remain at the sole disposal of the Committee. In consideration of this guarantee, and at the request of the United States, Spanish and Belgian Governments, His Majesty's Government has undertaken not to interfere with shipments of foodstuffs from neutral countries in neutral bottoms, consigned to the United States Minister at Brussels or to the United States Consul at Rotterdam. I understand from the United States Ambassador that consignments shipped to the United States Consul at Rotterdam will be warehoused at that port and will be forwarded as need arises to the United States and Spanish Ministers at Brussels. His Majesty's Government has made a grant of £100,000 to the Belgian Government for the purchase of foodstuffs toward the cost of these supplies.

'I believe a great part of these food supplies are purchased with money subscribed in the United States to relieve the distress of the Belgians, and the greatest care is to be taken that it should go to that and to no other object.' \*

**Hoover sends the news to Whitlock.**—The following day Hoover telegraphed to Whitlock at Brussels news of the decisions reached at the first conferences. His message was as follows: 'As a result of conference here between myself and Gibson representing Americans here and in Brussels, Baron Lambert and Francqui, representing the Central Comité, together with Mr. Page, we suggest that a purely American Relief Committee for Belgium be set up, comprising Mr. Whitlock, Mr. Page, and leading Americans in Brussels and London, which committee would undertake the systematic work of facilitating import of supplies under American Government's protection, and especially would undertake proper and systematic expenditure of funds for Belgium relief now being raised in America; such committee being properly recognised by the various governments concerned would put matters on permanent systematic neutral basis.'

**The First Meeting of the 'C.R.B.'**—At this time the plan was to make the Commission a purely American body, acting under the supervision of the American diplomatic representatives in London, Brussels, and The Hague. This plan, indeed, was actually set into operation on October 22, when the 'American Commission for Relief in Belgium,' was formally organised at a meeting held in London Wall Buildings, where offices of the Commission were opened. Hoover had already agreed on the arrangements with Ambassador Page and with Francqui. Both had requested him to organise and to head the American Commission. He had already won the support of some of the most active of his colleagues of the American Relief Committee. The meeting of October 22 was therefore chiefly concerned with adopting formally the organisation already mapped out. Those present at this historic session were Hoover, John B. White, Col. Millard Hunsiker, Edgar Rickard, Millard Shaler, Hugh Gibson, Capt. J. F. Lucey, and Clarence Graff. Hoover stated that the American Ambassador had asked him 'to set up an organisation to carry into execution the engagements undertaken by the American Ambassadors in London and Brussels with regard to the importation of foodstuffs, and relief generally for Belgium.' This sentence was the charter of the Commission. On it was based the whole *raison d'être* of the Commission.

**The Selection of a Name.**—The name to be selected for the new organisation had to be chosen. This name should indicate as briefly as possible the exact function of the body. The 'Belgian Relief Commission' would not do, because that would imply that the Commission intended to take over all relief work designed to aid Belgians in Holland, England and France as well as in Belgium. The name as finally adopted was admirably chosen to fit the purpose of the organisation: it was, 'The American Commission for Relief in Belgium.' There was, and in the nature of things could be, only one such body, so it was 'The Commission.' Its purpose was completely defined by the last four words. It was to work 'for relief *in* Belgium.'

**What the Commission has been called.**—In spite of the old quip, 'What's in a name?' the psychological effect of a name is very great, and in this case the name was very happily chosen. The Commission has been known by many other appellations. In Belgium and among the American members the name became abbreviated to C.R.B. (or say-air-bay, as the Belgians pronounced it). Often, too, it was spoken of simply as the American Commission. People in Belgium who did not know its name, but would see the letters C.R.B. on automobiles, lighters and dépôts, discovered other ingenuous appellations. 'Le Comité pour le Ravitaillement Belge' was a favourite solution to the mystery of those initials C.R.B. which the Belgian was to come to know so well. Often in Belgium also, and almost universally in France when the Commission extended its work there, it was known as the 'Spanish-American Relief Committee,' the 'Comité Hispano-Américain' or the 'Spanisch-Amerikanische Verpflegungs Komitee,' according to the tongue employed. On the outside (in England or in America) where the Commission's work was never very generally understood, it was often called the 'Hoover Commission,' in recognition of the part played by its organiser and chief. But the name finally chosen was the most fitting of all, for it indicated most clearly the nature of the organisation.

**The Plan of Organisation.**—Having chosen the name, the meeting next proceeded to adopt an organisation. It was resolved 'that the American Ambassador in England and the American Ministers in Belgium and Holland should be honorary chairmen; that Herbert Hoover should be chairman; that Dannie Heinemann should be vice-chairman and head of the Brussels office of the Commission; that Clarence Graff should be treasurer; and that Millard Shaler and William Hulse should be honorary secretaries in London and Brussels respectively.' Capt. J. F. Lucey and Millard Shaler were asked to go to Rotterdam to open an office there and organise the transshipment services as well as the necessary warehousing facilities and the service of transport into Belgium. Shaler, according to the original plan, was to spend his time between the Brussels and London offices in order to maintain the closest possible co-operation. John Beaver White was put in charge of the purchase and export of foodstuffs. Edgar Rickard was selected as head of the appeals department to mobilise the charity of the world in behalf of Belgium. The Commission decided also to open offices in all the chief centres in Belgium, and the American Consuls in Belgium, as well as in London and Rotterdam, were invited to become members of the Commission.

**The Final Conference.**—During the evening of the same day, October 22, a meeting was held at the American Embassy with Francqui and Baron Lambert, and the final arrangements were completed for the co-operation of the 'American Commission for Relief in Belgium' and the 'Comité Central' or, as it was now to become, the 'Comité National de Secours et d'Alimentation.' With this meeting the October conferences came to an end,

and the work of relief in Belgium was fairly launched. The next day Messrs. Francqui, Baron Lambert and Hugh Gibson left London for Brussels. Arriving in the Belgian capital on October 25, they at once began the work of national organisation inside Belgium.

**Hoover's Memorandum of the Problems to be attacked.**—It is interesting now, in looking back over the history of the Commission, to notice the memorandum, drawn up by Hoover on October 20, of the work to be undertaken and the objects to be attained by the Commission and the Comité National. No better statement could be made of the principles on which the relief was to be based than those set forth in this memorandum, which will be found in Volume II of the Commission Report, published in 1918.

The chief tasks to be undertaken by the Commission for Relief in Belgium and the Comité National respectively are clearly outlined in this memorandum. The most important points were to secure a sufficient food supply for all Belgium; to mobilise sufficient charity to care for the destitute; to provide finances for the purchases of supplies by effecting exchange arrangements and by securing subsidies from the Allied Governments. In order to succeed in these measures it was necessary to obtain from the Germans a guarantee of the non-requisition of native as well as of imported foodstuffs; to set up an organisation under the Comité National in Belgium to provide for the efficient distribution of food and charity; to establish an efficient control system of the Commission for Relief in Belgium; to organise the public opinion of the world by a press campaign in support of the work of relief in Belgium; and to gain the necessary permits and, if possible, subsidies from the Allied Governments.

**The Co-operation of Spanish Diplomats.**—On October 22 it was decided to invite the Spanish Minister in Brussels and the Spanish Ambassador in London to become honorary chairmen of the American Commission. But it involved many complications and diplomatic difficulties to ask them to act in such a capacity toward a Commission that was formally as well as actively American in character. Whitlock, telegraphing from Brussels on October 25, said: "I am quite in accord with the proposal contained in Mr. Hoover's telegram of October 20, to organise an American relief committee to supply food to the civil population of Belgium. The name of the Spanish Minister here should not be omitted from the organisation. He has worked earnestly and efficiently, and because of our friendship it would be embarrassing to me if he were to be made to suffer in his feelings by anything that might be interpreted as a slight."

**The 'American' Commission becomes an International Neutral Body.**—On October 26 the Spanish Ambassador in London, who had taken an active part in the earlier negotiations, proposed to Mr. Hoover the co-operation of his own government in all diplomatic endeavours. The advantages of such diplomatic support were obvious. It would give the Commission a higher standing officially and would give greater weight to its efforts. It would make it an international movement, representing no one country or group of countries, but speaking rather for the whole of the humanitarian sentiment of the world. It would thus raise it above the level of ordinary political considerations and make it a semi-diplomatic body. It was, therefore, decided to drop the word 'American' from its name and to invite the Spanish diplomatic representatives and consuls in London and in Belgium to participate in its work. The Spanish Ambassador in London, Señor Don Merry del Val, and the Spanish Minister in Brussels, the Marquis de Villalobar, became, with the American diplomats already named, honorary chairmen of the Commission. The American Ambassador in Berlin, Mr. James W. Gerard, accepted the invitation

to become an honorary chairman a few days later, and in December the American Ambassador in Paris, Mr. R. G. Sharp, accepted a similar invitation. In the spring of 1915 a further extension of the diplomatic patronage of the Commission was made when the Jonkheer de Weede, Dutch Minister at Le Havre, became an honorary chairman of the Commission. For the next two years the Commission was to continue its work under the patronage of the United States, Spain and Holland. This confirmation of the eminently neutral character of the Commission was of the utmost service later on, when difficulties began to arise between the United States and Germany, and ultimately, in April 1917, it was the Dutch and Spanish patronage of the Commission that was to assure the continuance of the work of the Commission after the declaration of war between the United States and Germany. Until that time, however, the organisation had remained American in personnel, direction and methods. The representatives in Belgium and Northern France were almost exclusively Americans, and the majority of people in Belgium, as well as in England and France, continued to look upon the C.R.B. as an American organisation.

**Hoover reports results to Ambassador Page.**—Hoover, in writing officially to Page on October 22, set forth the scope of the organisation effected and sketched the work to be undertaken in co-operation with the Comité Central. Heinemann and Hulse were to become administrators of the Belgian Committee, and there were to be representatives of the Belgian Committee in each of the Commission offices in order to assure the fullest possible co-operation. Subject to the approval of the Ambassador, Hoover proposed making a general appeal to the American public for money and supplies. As he said, 'We are the only channel through which such relief can be introduced into Belgium, and the Comité Central is the only practical organisation through which it can be distributed.' Hoover also suggested that it would facilitate matters if the British Government would designate someone to work in touch with the Commission, 'and that this gentleman should be of such importance that he can unravel the miles of red tape that to-day entangle our feet.' \*

Page heartily approved of the appeal to the American public by means of a press campaign, and this was immediately set into motion. Ben S. Allan, of the Associated Press in London, was permitted by that news agency to become a member of the Commission. In New York, Will Irwin was enlisted as a member of the Commission and directed a very effective campaign in America in behalf of Belgium and the Commission.

**Co-operation from the British Government.**—Page also acted on Hoover's suggestion for co-operation with the British Government by presenting the suggestion to the Foreign Office, and after a careful consideration of the matter the Foreign Office designated Lord Eustace Percy to attend to all affairs between the British Government and the Commission. Lord Eustace was from the first extremely sympathetic to the Commission and its purposes, and by his effective assistance and continual advice rendered invaluable service to the work of Belgian relief.

**The Public Announcement of the Formation of the Commission.**—In two Associated Press dispatches sent out on October 21 and 22, the American public was informed of the organisation of the Commission and of the plan of work, and was asked to contribute of its substance to relieve the needs of Belgium. It was stated that nearly the

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\* Hoover to Page, October 22, 1914.

whole burden of relief in Belgium would fall on America, because practically all other nations are unable to act on account of the peculiar circumstances existing. The British Government takes the keenest interest, as the subscription of £100,000 demonstrates. At the same time Germany recognises the value of the scheme by giving its permission for the shipment of supplies. The Belgians are mightily pleased, and the government will render all assistance possible. . . . The Commission hopes that the situation may be brought urgently before the American people, that this charity to a liberty-loving nation may take the practical form of food supplies, and that the American organisations already soliciting help for the Belgians will co-operate with the Commission in the application of their resources.'\*

The organisation of the Commission's offices will be described in the next chapter. It is only necessary to add here that, within an almost incredibly short time, large quantities of food were actually *en route* to Belgium. The Commission was able to take a running start, and the experience of its heads in organising large affairs made it possible within a very few weeks to put into execution the plans agreed upon at the October conferences.

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\* *New York Times*, October 22, 1914.

## CHAPTER III

THE ORGANISATION OF THE COMMISSION'S WORK  
OUTSIDE BELGIUMTHE LONDON OFFICE, ORGANISATION OF SHIPPING, FINANCIAL AND  
CHARITY APPEAL DEPARTMENTS

**The Commission's Purpose.**—‘The Commission for Relief in Belgium has but a single purpose—to co-operate with all the charitable world in providing sufficient food to keep the people in Belgium alive until the war is over.’ This statement of the object of the Commission, as set forth on the cover-page of a general statement of the Commission's organisation, issued February 22, 1915, appears extremely simple. The task itself was far from being simple. The complexities of the various phases of the Commission's activities were such that many volumes would be required to explain them with as much detail as has been given in the opening chapters to sketching the origin of the relief work in Belgium. Origins are always of great importance and significance. The causes which led to the creation of an institution, the motives that actuated its founders, the problems it had to solve, the conditions that determined its inception, usually leave their trace firmly imprinted on all the later development of that institution. So it was in the case of the Commission. Its sphere of action was greatly extended, its operations came to be vastly larger, its burdens and its influence became greatly increased—but the dominating spirit, the guiding principles remained unchanged.

**The Commission's Methods of Work.**—Volunteer service was to be used as much as possible, and the idea was always to accomplish as much as possible, with a maximum expenditure of energy and directed intelligence, and a minimum expenditure of money. First and foremost the purpose of the Commission in Mr. Hoover's own words was ‘to feed the Belgians.’ All other considerations were of secondary moment. To succeed in this purpose every resource available was to be utilised. All objections from the various governments involved were to be overcome by persuasion, by personal appeals based on the broadest humanitarian principles, by exact statements of the situation free from diplomatic phraseology, by moral pressure from public opinion within or without the countries concerned, and, in the last emergency, by threats of imposing the burden of responsibility for the enforced stoppage of the relief squarely upon the Power concerned. All material obstacles, such as financial difficulties, shipping troubles, or questions of distribution, were to be overcome by careful organisation, by efficient application of trained intelligence and of business methods. As a writer in the *Times* ‘History of the War’ pointed out, the Commission aimed, not only at the mobilisation of benevolence, but also at the establishment of a world-wide relief organisation whose key-note should be efficiency, an efficiency not in the least impaired because this business organisation was devoted to saving a nation from famine, and the worst consequences of war instead of to the accumulation of profit for its participants. ‘The Commission carried out to the full the idea of mobilisation : it

called upon the rich for their money, upon the able for their brains, and upon the young for their sinews ; what it introduced was in effect the conscription of the benevolent.' As the same writer also pointed out : ' The work of the relief and feeding of Belgium must take its place among the highest achievements compassed by the heart and mind of man in the exaltation of a great struggle. The account of how this work was accomplished is not only a story of generosity and self-sacrifice on the part of those who successfully performed the task, but an example of forethought, organisation, effort and resolution rarely met with except in the great issue of life and death.' \*

**The Task of the Commission.**—Some account must now be given of the way in which the Commission set about the work it had taken in hand. As stated in the report of the work of the Commission, published April 12, 1915, ' An organisation had to be set up to undertake the following principal functions :

(A) The creation of the detailed organisation necessary for the systematic and discriminating provisioning and clothing of the destitute, not only with imports, but also by the purchase and distribution of native foods.

(B) The co-ordination, central control and stimulation of charitable effort throughout the world in the support of the destitute.

(C) The elaboration of the necessary organisation for equitable distribution of the imported provisions to those who could pay for their own food.

(D) The establishment of the financial machinery, by agreement among the various Powers and with banking institutions, providing for working capital, and the translation into gold of local currency and obligations collected in Belgium.

(E) The purchase overseas and shipment and inland transport throughout Belgium of the essential foodstuffs.

(F) The execution of the undertakings with the various belligerent governments assuring protection on the high seas and non-interference on land, and the distribution of the native as well as the imported foodstuffs exclusively to the civil population.

(G) The maintenance of accurate accounting, auditing and other checks upon all branches of the work, not only to provide evidence as to the execution of guarantees, but also to ensure integrity of administration.'

**The Moral Basis of the Commission's strength.**— The successful carrying out of the Commission's work depended from the first on two principal things, the support of public opinion in allied and neutral countries, and the full confidence of all the governments concerned. An extensive press campaign had to be organised and maintained in order to win the support of public opinion, and the contributions necessary for the benevolent work of the Commission. By a rigid adherence to the principles of neutrality, and by a straightforward and efficient accomplishment of the task undertaken by it, the Commission was able to win the confidence of the belligerent powers, and to persuade them to make agreements with each other through the intermediary of neutral diplomats, which practically amounted to treaties. The Commission, indeed, became 'almost a new Power. It was accorded a flag of its own, and it entered into diplomatic relations with the warring and neutral countries. . . . Its ships passed unmolested across the seas, members of the Commission were welcomed by the Ministers of all the European Governments, and the

\* *Times* · History of the War, vol. iv., pages 441–456.

German military authorities allowed the accredited representatives of the Commission to travel freely in Belgium.'\*

**Relations with the British Government.**—The difficulties encountered in making the first shipments, the cargoes of the 'Coblentz' and the 'Iris,' through the red tape encountered in the negotiations for permits, were soon cleared away, and the light they shed on the situation made it possible to avoid similar trouble in the future. The arrangement was made with the Foreign Office by the intervention of Ambassador Page that Hoover had suggested. The Foreign Office assigned Lord Eustace Percy to the work of co-operating with the Commission, and the members of the Commission were permitted to go directly to the officials concerned in any matter of Commission business, instead of having to go the circuitous diplomatic route. This ready and friendly co-operation on the part of the British authorities made the work of the Commission in London infinitely easier.

**The Shipping Problem.**—The London office was very soon organized and running in good shape. Mr. John Beaver White was delegated to look after the purchases of food-stuffs, and he, acting with Colonel Hunsiker and Mr. Hoover, and with the Belgian representative, soon worked out advantageous arrangements for making food-purchases in the various markets of the world, and for securing ships to carry the purchases to Belgium. The shipping difficulty was from the first one of the greatest with which the Commission had to contend. The first permission of the English Government was only for the use of neutral ships, and it was very difficult to obtain sufficient bottoms to carry the food needed. With a program that called for 80,000 tons of food to be delivered monthly in Rotterdam, some twenty ocean-going steamers would be required to arrive at that port in each month. This would necessitate the Commission having more than double that number under charter. In fact, at later periods the Commission often had as many as seventy-five ships under charter at the same time. The rise in cargo rates made the transportation costs of the Commission a very considerable item. If English ships could be used it would greatly lessen the difficulty and expense of securing ships. At Mr. Hoover's request, therefore, the matter was taken up by Ambassador Page in London and by Ambassador Gerard in Berlin.†

**Permission to use Allied Shipping.**—The English Government agreed, after considerable discussion of the matter, that English ships could be used if the German Government would guarantee to them the same protection accorded the neutral ships in the service of the Commission on their way to and from Rotterdam. On November 23 Gerard wired that 'the German Government is entirely in sympathy with the laudable work of the American Commission for Belgian relief. Germany will not interfere with any neutral ships bound for Holland with food from the United States, if the food is destined for Belgium. Subject to later revocation, the German Government agrees to permit unneutral ships also to carry food for the Belgians to Dutch ports, and will give the same guarantee as for neutral ships. The German Government recommends that, as a precaution, such unneutral ships should carry a certificate from the competent American authority testifying that the ship carries food for the Belgians to be brought to Belgium via Dutch ports by the American Commission for Belgian relief, with the consent of the German Government, and that unneutral ships also should have pass which the German Ambassador, Washington, will issue upon certificate above described.'‡

\* *Times* 'History of the War,' vol. iv., page 444.

† See Telegrams State Department to Gerard, November 7, 1914—November 20, 1914.

‡ Gerard to Page, November 22, 1914.



**Arrangements for the Protection of Commission Ships.**—Upon this assurance the English gave the permission for the use of ships of British registry by the Commission, and Hoover immediately arranged through the New York office and the State Department for facilitating the issuance of the necessary passes and permits to assure to the Commission ships the immunity promised. Each ship was provided with a large flag with the words ‘Commission Belgian Relief, Rotterdam,’ upon it, and cloth signs were affixed to each side of the ship with a similar inscription. Each ship was given by the American Customs authorities a certificate stating the nature of the cargo and its destination. Upon this certificate the German Ambassador in Washington would issue a permit, and upon this in turn the German Consul of the port of departure would issue the necessary safe-conduct pass. The British Consul also would issue a certificate to the ship. Such a number and variety of passes often took some time to secure, but were essential to ensure the safety of the ship. Later on, when the submarine campaign increased in intensity at various times, the shipping arrangements had to be modified, and these modifications will be dealt with in the proper place. The essential thing, however, is that the Commission ships always enjoyed the promise of immunity.

**The Organisation of the Shipping Department.**—It very soon became evident to Hoover and his associates in London that the only possible way to efficiently manage the shipping of the food supplies to Belgium was to centralise all shipping arrangements in the hands of the Commission. If the various Belgian relief bodies in different parts of the world each sought to charter ships for their own cargoes, the result would be very unsatisfactory. The committees would be competing with each other for bottoms, and would certainly have to pay a bigger price than would be the case if all shipping matters were to be taken over by the Commission. As soon as Hoover was certain that he could depend on a considerable sum of money (£600,000) for transportation expenses, he made arrangements to organise the shipping department of the Commission. Two of the most important English shipping firms, Bird, Potter & Hughes, and Trinder & Anderson, readily agreed to establish the Commission’s shipping department absolutely without compensation. Hoover had already had the experience of bidding against the New York Belgian Relief Committee and the Rockefeller Foundation in New York for ships. He therefore requested them on November 13 to turn over all shipping matters to the Commission, and this they ultimately agreed to do.

**Arrangements for the Purchase of Food.**—Another difficulty arose from a similar competition of relief agencies in the case of food purchases. As Hoover wired to New York on November 15: ‘It is as great a folly for us to compete against Rockefeller for the purchase of foodstuffs in America as for them to try to compete with us in the transport business. We have now practically arranged very large funds for purchase of foodstuffs for the self-supporting population of Belgium, who have no way of obtaining food except through this Commission. In order to make these purchases we must have a single control, non-competition and a continuous regular flow of foodstuffs.’ This, too, was ultimately arranged through co-operation in making the purchases, and later on the purchases of wheat and other supplies were taken over by representatives of Armour & Co., and by one of the officials of the Chicago Board of Trade, Mr. E. G. Broenniman, who, by carefully watching the market, were able to secure the quantities needed by the Commission at a considerable figure less than the average quotation.

**Financial Problems and Proposals.**—The Commission finally succeeded also in

making the arrangements for securing sufficient financial resources to permit the carrying out of the Commission's program. On November 7 Francqui had sent word from Brussels that a sum of £600,000 had been loaned by a group of Belgian bankers, and that this sum would be advanced to the Commission in London.

Negotiations were entered into even before this time with the German authorities in Brussels to permit the Commission to work out an arrangement for the exchanging of money, i.e. the Commission to receive money on the outside, which it would use in the purchase of food to be sent to Belgium, and the equivalent of these sums to be paid in Belgium by the Comité National to the person or institution designated, from funds received by the Comité National from the sale of imported foodstuffs to the self-supporting part of the population. Heinemann had written the chief of the civil administration on November 4, emphasising the financial difficulties of the relief work and the impracticability of securing exchange in the ordinary way, or of exporting the moneys received in Belgium.\* He pointed out also that the Belgian Government possessed considerable resources abroad, and would be able to turn over considerable sums to the Commission if the Germans would permit the equivalent of the sums so paid to the Commission to be disbursed in Belgium to pay interest on Belgium bonds, pensions, salaries of civil and communal employees, who remained at their posts in Belgium, as well as the wages of the railroad employees who were unemployed. The following day Dr. von Sandt, chief of the civil administration, replied, stating that, in accord with the Governor-General, he was ready to permit the exchange arrangements proposed, on the condition that the money expended for the Belgian Government in Belgium should be used exclusively to pay pensions and the salaries of such employees of the Belgian State for whose services the German Government had no need. The money to be used in this way was to be deposited in the Banque Nationale de Belgique at Brussels in a special account, and all persons approved by the Germans could draw their pensions and salaries from this account.

M. Jean Jadot, the governor of the Banque Nationale, made a trip to Le Havre in the early part of November on various matters connected with his bank. In the course of his visit he took up with the Belgian Government the project of arranging through the Commission and the Comité National for the payment in Belgium of the obligations of the Belgian Government. The advantages of the scheme were obvious, so far as the population in Belgium were concerned. The Commission would be put monthly in possession of a very considerable sum of money, a sum estimated by Jadot at 14,000,000 francs (\$2,800,000 or £560,000) monthly. At the same time a similar sum would be put in circulation in Belgium, and thousands of families would be saved from destitution, by the sums they would receive as wages, pensions or interest from the Belgian Government.

Hoover had been busy in London at the same time in advocating the same measures. He had taken up the matter through Ambassador Page both with the Belgian and English Governments. He had several meetings with M. Berryer, Belgian Minister of the Interior, and with M. E. Carton de Wiart, who was appointed financial delegate of the Belgian Government to the Commission.

**The Necessity for Subsidies from the Allied Governments.**—In the first weekly report of the Commission to the protecting diplomats the situation had been clearly set forth. It is well worth while to quote some of the more salient points. 'It appears to us that this

\* Heinemann's memorandum.

emergency of provisioning a whole nation is of such an order that we cannot depend upon the efforts of private philanthropy for its positive solution, and that the brunt of this must fall upon the three governments which are so critically involved in this situation, viz., Belgium, England and France. Whilst every possible device to secure private philanthropy will be used by this Commission, and no doubt will result satisfactorily, 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. It is useless to tell us that when we have expended some allotment of money that we can apply for more, because if this problem is to be properly handled we have got to make arrangements now for future supplies for three or more months, and we cannot depend on the "Gifts of the Gods" to meet such eventualities. For transportation purposes we must charter ships extending over months, and we must be assured of eventual money to make up by purchase in the best markets of the world deliveries to supplement such deficiencies as may exist in the voluntary offerings, and, furthermore, if we had behind us a solid substratum of income, we could stimulate this quarter to very much greater advantage.

'We have asked the Belgian Government to place at our disposal the money secured for Belgian relief in the United States, and in order to organise the various efforts being made in America, we have asked the governors of each of the large agricultural states to appoint a commission to collect and receive food in each of these territories. It would most materially assist this collection of food if we could say to these good people throughout the United States that this Commission will, at its own cost, undertake the entire transport of foodstuffs which may be secured. The value of cereal foods delivered in Belgium is between ten and twelve pounds per ton, of which some two pounds per ton may be taken as transportation costs. Therefore practically £5 of food will be secured for every £1 of expenditure made in this manner. If it can be arranged that we have guaranteed a subvention of this kind from the three governments concerned, assuring us a minimum of £400,000 per month, we are confident that we can handle the situation, for by means of the difference on gifts of foods and the recovery on resale we should be able to make up the margin.'\*

On November 5 the Commission had addressed a petition to Sir Edward Grey, explaining to him in detail the work undertaken by the Commission, its extent and its financial requirements, and stating that the only thing that would make possible the continuance of the work would be a monthly subsidy from the governments of the Allies amounting to £4-500,000. All the gifts that might be expected would not provide enough to feed all of Belgium. The provision of a transportation fund would help greatly in stimulating and making available food donations in America. Hoover, therefore, asked for a subsidy of £150,000 monthly from the British Government and a similar sum from the French Government. He pointed out the obligation of England and France to Belgium for her heroic resistance to the invading armies, and expressed the hope that the western allies would be generous enough to make it possible to save the Belgian people from the threatened famine.

**Negotiations to ensure Financial Support to the Commission.**—About a week later Hoover went to Le Havre and there had conferences with various members of the Belgian Government and with M. Jadot. As a result of the conferences M. Berryer, Minister of the Interior, offered to provide a floating capital of £1,000,000 as a loan to the

\* First weekly report of Hoover as chairman of Commission to the Diplomatic Patrons, November 3, 1914.

Comité National on condition that M. Solvay, L. van der Rest (governor of the Société Générale de Belgique) and Jadot (governor of the Banque Nationale de Belgique), acting for the Committee, should guarantee the repayment of this sum to the Belgian Government at the close of operations. This solved at once the question of a working capital, and provided for the Commission the transportation fund it so badly needed to centralise the food gifts, and to solve the shipping question. With the £600,000 already advanced as a loan to the Comité National by Belgian Bankers, £1,600,000 (\$8,000,000) was available.

The negotiations with the various governments for reaching a solution to the exchange problem and for arranging a regular monthly subsidy were continued, both by Hoover and by his Belgian colleagues. On December 1 Whitlock was able to write Page that the German Government in Belgium had definitely approved the plan proposed for making payments in Belgium, but it was not until January that the consent and support of the allied governments was gained.

**The distinction between the Provisioning and Benevolent aspects of the Commission's task.**—It is necessary in considering the work of the Commission, its financial problems and charitable schemes, to remember that these were of two very different sorts. The first and pre-eminent task undertaken was to supply the whole of the Belgian people with the basic foods. A great proportion of these people could pay for the rations, and the money they paid in might be used through the exchange arrangements to secure funds in the outside world with which new purchases could be made. The exchange arrangements at best could only provide a means for buying the supplies needed by the self-supporting population. There was, in addition, the very big problem of caring for the destitute population, which by November 1 was estimated to amount to 1,200,000 people, or one-sixth of the total number of inhabitants remaining in Belgium. In addition to providing food for the self-supporting the Commission had to secure food for these destitute, and to devise means of raising funds to cover the cost of this benevolent department of the Commission's work. This division in the problems of the Commission was recognised even in the organisation. In Belgium the work was divided into two quite distinct departments, the Provisioning Department and the Benevolent or Relief Department. The Comité National de Secours (Relief et d'Alimentation (Provisioning) by its very title indicates the dual nature of its task.

The Commission proposed to raise the funds needed for its benevolent department by an appeal to the charity of the world, by 'mobilising benevolence,' to care for the destitute. It was estimated that a sum of four to five millions of dollars monthly would be required, even at the outset. Roughly one-half of this could be secured in Belgium through local charity or through the profits from the sale of food to the self-supporting. The balance must come from abroad.

#### THE APPEAL TO CHARITY AND THE ORGANISATION OF THE COMMISSION'S WORK IN AMERICA

**First Appeals for aid to Belgium.**—The London office had from the first realised the importance of publicity for the work of the Commission, and a great effort was made to keep the Belgian situation before the newspaper reading public. People all over the world were eager to know what was happening in Belgium. Many Belgian relief committees had been already organised in various parts of the world to collect funds to aid the Belgian refugees. The diplomatic and consular representatives of Belgium had

tried to stimulate the charitable activities of these committees. The Count de Lalaing was instrumental in the creation of the Belgian Relief Fund in Great Britain. M. Havenith, the Belgian Minister in Washington, had similarly assisted in the organisation of committees throughout the United States to raise funds to relieve the sufferings of his countrymen. In New York some of the recognised leaders in charitable work had organised a New York Belgian Relief Committee, which collected more than \$250,000 in two months. Similar committees had been organised in other cities. All these efforts, however, had been scattered and uncentralised. The various activities often overlapped. There was no common object to which the various committees were devoted. There even existed invidious jealousy and competition between the various committees.

With the organisation of the Commission for Relief in Belgium began a campaign to centralise all Belgian relief efforts and to devote all funds collected in America to relief inside Belgium. The Comité National and the Commission were the only bodies authorised to extend such relief. There was no other way to send money or food to Belgium. The Comité National therefore requested the Belgian Government to recognise the Commission as the only channel through which gifts could be sent to Belgium. Belgian relief committees in Canada, Nova Scotia and New Zealand, which had already collected funds and arranged food shipments, were instructed to consign their shipments to the Commission for Relief in Belgium. The first complete cargo, received on November 15 at Rotterdam, was the 'Tremorvah,' a gift shipment from Nova Scotia that had been arranged before the organisation of the Commission. The Commission used its best efforts to co-ordinate all relief activities in the United States and elsewhere designed to aid Belgium and the Belgians. During the first few months embarrassing complications were occasionally encountered before the Commission's position was recognised, but ultimately the difficulties were overcome and the work of centralising charitable efforts was put on a harmonious basis.

**The Commission's Appeal to America.**—Shaler had met Thomas F. Ryan in London in the early part of October and had discussed the Belgian situation with him. Ryan had promised to do all he could in America to aid the work of sending food to Belgium. Whitlock's message from Belgium and the Commission's appeals sent out by the Associated Press were published widely in America and very soon began to produce tangible results. Many prominent men in America personally known to Hoover or his associates were appealed to directly to aid by forming local committees to collect funds. Heinemann telegraphed from Brussels to some of his business associates, notably S. R. Bertron, asking them also to organise Belgian relief subscriptions.

**Attempts to unify the Belgian Relief Movement in America.**—In order to systematise the charitable appeal and the shipping and purchase arrangements, the Commission felt the need of establishing a branch office in New York to supervise the work of the Commission in America. It was at first believed that Ryan might be induced to take charge of the Commission office to be established in New York, but he was unable to undertake the work. Meanwhile, numerous cables came to the Commission's office or to the American Embassy in London from many people in America volunteering to help in any possible way. Ryan and de Forest, of the New York Belgian Relief Committee, cabled both Van Dyke and Page offering to make contributions and arrange shipments. The impression prevailed in America at this time that the Commission was only a London committee under Page's direction to forward supplies to Belgium. Hence the New York

and other committees went on making independent appeals and arranging independent shipments variously consigned to the American Ambassador in London, the Minister at The Hague, the Consul in Rotterdam, or to the Commission. As Hoover put it in a telegram to New York at this time: 'To the embarrassment of the Ambassadors, people in America insist on cabling them instead of myself in these matters. We must centralise efforts and get people to recognise the Commission as the only channel for relief to Belgium.'

Hoover had been in communication with his friend and associate Lindon W. Bates since the inception of his interest in Belgian relief, and on October 28 cabled to him asking him to help in the work, and outlining the plan for organisation of the Commission's work in America through the use of sub-committees in the various principal places, to collect and ship food. Bates had written Hoover on October 19 stating that he had seen the press dispatches of Hoover's part in organising the Commission, and adding: 'It's a fine idea; you were always a born consolidator, and would consolidate the solar system if there was a chance to make a needed fundamental change in this wicked world.' Bates was quite willing to help Hoover in his new undertaking, and on October 29 cabled that he would help as much as he could, and that his wife might be able to form a strong committee to enlist all women's organisations in America to procure food and money.

On November 1 the Rockefeller Foundation announced its intention of devoting large sums to war relief work in Europe and of sending shipments of food immediately to Belgium. The Foundation went ahead independently to buy food, charter ships and despatch the cargoes to Belgium. The representatives of the Foundation soon arranged with the New York Belgian Relief Committee to co-operate with them to manage the Belgian relief affairs in New York. The Foundation provided a dock and warehouse at Bush Terminal. The New York committee was to collect funds, receive gifts, and purchase foods for shipment to Belgium. In these arrangements the Commission had no part, and indeed was hardly even consulted, as the New York committee and the Rockefeller Foundation regarded it merely as a distributing agency, and proposed to organise themselves the collecting end in America.

**The Necessity for Control by the Commission.**—This did not at all solve the problem, however. The Commission had been provided with large funds to expend in chartering ships and buying food, and Hoover naturally felt that the expenditure of this money and the handling of shipping should be controlled directly by the Commission through a branch office in New York that would be subject to orders from London. Telegraphing Bates on October 30, Hoover stated that 'stronger action than that proposed by Ryan is necessary. . . . We are asking the formation of a committee of leading New York men who will recognise that the situation requires a strong and important body in New York to control the expenditure of the various relief funds already raised and see that they reach Belgium in the shape of food, instead of being given independent application. . . . Under the various international agreements it is utterly impossible for any relief or foodstuffs to reach Belgium except through this Commission.'

Hoover set to work to clear the way for the systematic organisation of Belgian relief work in America. In conferences with the Belgian Ministers he arranged to have positive and definite instructions sent to the Belgian Minister in Washington that all committees organised under his patronage should work through the Commission. Telegrams were sent to the governors of all the important food-producing states asking them to appoint committees to collect gifts of food to be sent to Belgium. William C.

Edgar, editor of the *Northwestern Miller*, had been for some time endeavouring to arrange for a gift shipment of flour to Belgium, and Hoover, accepting this offer with gratitude, arranged with him the details of the shipment. A long statement was issued to the Press on October 31 explaining in detail the organisation and purpose of the Commission and describing the conditions prevailing in Belgium. The point was emphasised that 'The Commission for Relief in Belgium is the official body recognised by the various governments for the transmission of food-shippments into Belgium; it is the only channel through which food can be introduced into Belgium; and has by its association with a committee in Belgium the only efficient agency for the distribution of food within the country.' \*

**King Albert's appeal to America.**—The following day an appeal from King Albert to the American public was published. 'I am informed,' said the Belgian King, 'that American officials and private citizens in Belgium and England are working to save my people from the horrors of the famine which now threatens them.

'It is a great comfort to me in this hour to feel that a great-hearted people is directing its efforts to relieving the distress of the unoffending civilian population in my country.

'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.

'I confidently hope the appeal of the American Commission will meet with a generous response. The whole-hearted friendship of America shown my people at this time will be a precious memory.

(Signed) 'ALBERT.'

**The Organisation of the Belgian Relief Movement in America.**—In response to these announcements and to the telegrams sent out from London to the governors of states and to prominent citizens in the various chief places, local and state relief committees were almost immediately organised throughout the United States. Many of the states set out to collect a whole cargo of food as their contribution. In such states as California, Iowa, Pennsylvania, Kansas, Virginia, Ohio, the movement was enthusiastically directed and brought big results. The creation of these local Belgian relief committees made it all the more necessary that the position of the Commission should be clearly recognised, and that it should, through a New York branch, control and direct the Belgian relief activities in such a way as to secure the maximum of efficiency and to prevent wastage. The State Department at Page's request gladly gave official recognition to the work of the Commission. Lansing, Acting-Secretary of State, in replying to a request for information from the Governor of Iowa, on November 7, wired that 'The Commission for Relief in Belgium is the only agency that has machinery for the distribution of food in Belgium. It has the benefit of complete diplomatic arrangements with all the belligerent governments. It works with the only committee in Belgium that has machinery for local distribution in every community. No cargo is safe unless it is properly shipped and consigned. All shipping directions are given by Herbert Hoover, chairman of the Commission in London.'

**The Establishment of the New York Office of the Commission.**—Such a clear statement was greatly needed, as the misunderstanding of the Commission's functions and

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\* *New York Times*, October 31, 1914.

position had already led to serious muddles in several parts of the country. Hoover asked Bates on November 13 to open an office in New York to be known as the Executive Agency of the Commission for Relief in Belgium in New York, and to take charge of the office as vice-chairman of the Commission. Robert D. MacCarter, a well-known electrical engineer who had volunteered his services to Hoover, was asked to act as honorary secretary of the New York office. At the same time Hoover was able through the funds received from the Belgian committee and the Belgian Government to make the announcement that all shipping expenses of gift foods from any place in America to Belgium would be borne by the Commission. The Commission would, therefore, take over the entire control of all food from the time of shipment.

This measure gave to the Commission immediately the necessary control of shipments and made it possible to effectively manage the collecting and shipping of the food-supplies contributed throughout the United States. The New York Belgian Relief Committee and the Rockefeller Foundation were at first loath to abandon the scheme they had devised for collecting and shipping themselves the food to be contributed in America, but they were soon convinced of the wisdom of leaving all such matters to the expert services of the Commission, and of devoting their efforts to the collecting of funds. The Rockefeller Foundation sent a special delegation, headed by Dr. Wickliffe Rose, to Europe at the end of November to investigate the conditions in the various countries that had most suffered in the war. Mr. Hoover met this delegation in London and after a few conferences the Foundation people heartily endorsed the Commission and its work and recommended to the Foundation that it provide the Commission with 10,000 or more tons of food monthly, to be turned over to the Commission in America and shipped by it to Belgium under its own control.

The work of the New York Office.—By the end of November thousands of tons of gift foods had been collected in the various parts of America, and were being shipped to Belgium. The New York Office, with the aid of the Belgian Minister, secured from many of the railroads free transportation for all food given to the Commission. Special reductions of rates were granted by the express companies, and arrangements were made with the postal authorities for the expeditious handling of parcels consigned to the Commission and for payment of the charges at the destination point by the Commission. R. D. MacCarter and Lindon W. Bates, Jr., negotiated these advantageous arrangements for the Commission and soon had the inland shipping problem well in hand.

The New York firm of Norton, Lilley & Co. had put itself at the disposal of the New York office of the Commission, and had arranged for it the warehousing and loading of the ships under charter of the Commission. Before the end of the year ships had been cleared from some twenty American ports for Rotterdam, with relief cargoes. Here, again, the possibility of obtaining expert service lightened the expenses and lessened the difficulties of the Commission, and added immeasurably to the efficiency of its operations.

**Contributions from the British Empire.**—It must not be understood that the Commission limited its appeal to charity to the United States. Just as great efforts were made throughout the British Dominions as in the United States, with even more satisfactory results; Belgian relief committees had been organised in Nova Scotia, Canada, Australia and New Zealand even before the Commission was formed. The first gift shipments of food to arrive in Rotterdam had been collected by these committees and turned over to the Commission. The self-governing Dominions in the British Empire felt the keenest sympathy



for Belgium, and their enthusiastic participation in the war had been to a great extent due to this sympathy. They were therefore quite ready to help with food and money this country to defend which they had gone to war. A number of the leading English literary men wrote special articles for the Commission appealing for aid to Belgium, and these appeals received the greatest response in the British Colonies. In Australia and New Zealand the Dominion Governments made special appropriations to be expended in the purchase of food to be donated to Belgium. The *per capita* contribution collected by the committees in Canada, Australia and New Zealand was a considerably higher figure than that for the United States.

**The National Committee for Relief in Belgium.** In Great Britain there had been created during the first month of the war a Belgian relief fund which had been entrusted to the control of the Belgian Minister. At the beginning of the Commission's work a special contribution of £100,000 was made from this fund to the Commission. In the following months efforts were made to secure new allotments from this fund for the purposes of the Commission's work. This fund, however, had been first raised for the purpose of assisting Belgian refugees in England, and those who controlled it felt a certain reluctance in devoting the money to other purposes. The Commission therefore decided to ask a number of the most prominent men in public life to organise a special committee to raise funds to support the charitable department of the Commission's work. In the month of April, 1915, there was formed a National Committee for Belgian Relief with the Lord Mayor of London as chairman, and with an executive committee comprising many of the most distinguished names of Great Britain. This committee, under the direction of the Duke of Norfolk, of Shirley Benn, M.P., and of its active secretary, W. A. M. Goode, achieved magnificent results. In America the campaign of the Commission had been specially for contributions of food. In England, on the contrary, money and not food was asked for, and England responded generously to the call. Thousands of committees were formed throughout the British Empire, with the patronage of local governments everywhere, to collect subscriptions to the National Committee. In the course of its two years of work the National Committee collected a total of £2,411,222 18s. 2d., an average of over £100,000 a month in cash contributed to the relief of the destitute in Belgium. Of this sum nearly three-fourths came from the British overseas dominions: Australia in round figures contributed £990,000, New Zealand £505,000, Canada £170,000, India £39,000, South Africa £35,000. The total contributions received from New Zealand work out at an average of twelve shillings and sixpence *per capita* of the population, a higher figure than in the case of any other country.

**The Response to the Commission's Appeal.** There has probably never been so large, so widespread and so productive a charitable campaign as this one carried on by the Commission and its co-operating bodies for the benefit of the destitute in Belgium. In a later chapter, devoted to the charitable department of the Commission's work, the use of this money will be fully described. The total of the gifts of money and clothing and food through the Commission to Belgium for the first year amounted to \$17,000,000, nearly £3,500,000. If there should be added to this sum the profits of the provisioning department during the first year, profits which were the direct result of the volunteer direction of the Commission and the generous concessions given it throughout the world, the total of the contributions of the world to Belgian relief in the first year can be estimated at \$25,000,000 or £5,000,000.

**Hoover's Summary of the Results obtained in the First Months.**— Hoover, in an address delivered before the American Luncheon Club in London on December 15, 1914,

summarised the work that had been achieved up to that time. The normal consumption of cereals in Belgium, he said, was 270,000 tons monthly, of which 230,000 tons were ordinarily imported. As a result of the war all importation had ceased and a certain percentage of the native stocks had been destroyed. Hence the country had been brought to the verge of famine. The Commission, in co-operation with the Comité National, had undertaken to provide a monthly importation of 80,000 tons of cereals to make possible a daily ration of 300 grams of bread. This ration was the minimum amount that would keep body and soul together, and yet the cost of providing the food would be over \$6,000,000 monthly. 'There are three different classes in Belgium,' he said, 'to be assisted: first, those who are destitute and to whom a free meal ticket is issued, entitling them to two rations daily at the communal canteens; the second are those members of the lower class who still have some resources, and consequently who are able to pay for the ration which they receive from the canteens; the third class are the middle and upper strata of Belgian society who still have considerable money, and they are provided, not with meals at canteens, but with bread and certain other staple products which they receive from communal depôts. . . . As this enterprise is one for the provisioning of the rich as well as the poor, it is a veritable democracy of famine.'

Hoover, in discussing the financial aspects of the Commission's work, spoke of the transportation fund that had been put at the disposition of the Commission, with the result that all food or money donated was applied directly to relief in Belgium. 'In this particular, I think, this organisation is unique as, in the ordinary course, large philanthropic efforts through necessity or otherwise, find themselves compelled to make large expenditures for administration and collateral charges, but so far as concerns the philanthropic American public, we are able to say that not one penny of the immense funds gathered there has been expended otherwise than for actual food for the people in Belgium. The result of this has been to establish confidence in the United States in our operations, and has contributed materially to the wonderful response we have had to our appeals. There is nothing which has occurred in the history of the American people which has so deeply stirred their sympathy, and the response is greater to-day than even that for the San Francisco earthquake.

**The Internal Organisation of the Commission.** 'Now as to the internal organisation of the Commission. Having in front of us what we believe to be the largest problem ever undertaken in the way of relief, and this problem having been entrusted largely to American business men, we have felt that it was up to us to demonstrate that business could be applied to philanthropy in our hands with an efficiency and an integrity which should make a creditable record in our national history. In order to fulfil diplomatic nicety, the American and Spanish Ministers are called honorary chairmen. They do not, however, occupy any position so far as our work is concerned. We early determined that the business executive should be controlled by a small body of men; that in a work of this order it was utterly impossible to carry on the business details if we were dependent upon volunteers, no matter how efficient, who had other affairs which were their dominant interests. It was necessary that our members should be men accustomed to the direction of large enterprises, who possessed the spirit of self-sacrifice in full measure. Of such men are Colonel Hunsiker, John White, Edgar Rickard, Robert MacCarter, Millard Shaler, Will Irwin, Lindon Bates and Captain Lucey. Our operations are controlled by an executive committee of some twenty men, a portion of this committee sitting in London, Brussels, Rotterdam and New York. In addition to this we have some fifty volunteers pledged for longer or shorter

periods, directing our branch offices in America, Holland and Belgium. Among these are some twenty Rhode Scholars from Oxford. We have also a paid staff in subordinate capacities of over 100 persons.

'Our food and shipping business is, as you can imagine, of large dimensions, and the great English firms of Bird, Potter & Hughes, Trinder Anderson & Co., W. P. Wood & Co., Harvey Trinder & Co., and the New York firm of Norton Lilley & Co., have given us their services free of charge for the doing of this work, and they have provided our offices with the necessary men and equipment to conduct the work, and this without cost to us, even for salaries. We have engaged the firm of Deloitte, Plender, Griffiths & Co. as cashiers and accountants, and they actually keep the books in all our offices with their own men.

'In two particulars, I think, the organisation is unique, as I know of no other philanthropic body which issues to the world a weekly balance-sheet, and I know of none whose administration costs less than one per cent. of its turnover, as does ours.' \*

**The Functioning of the Commission's Service of Supply.** By the end of December the Commission had succeeded in creating the machinery for getting food quickly and economically to Rotterdam. As a result of the appeal to the American people and to the British Dominions, hundreds of thousands of tons of food of all kinds had been donated. This food had been for the most part shipped by the railroads free of charge to the nearest ports, and stored there waiting shipment in warehouses also furnished gratuitously to the Commission. The London and New York offices had set their various departments to functioning and all the complicated details of the vast operations involved in the gathering of food for a whole nation were being efficiently attended to. Ships chartered and insured for the Commission by the firms who had volunteered their services to organise its shipping department had gone to ports as widely scattered as Halifax, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Norfolk, New Orleans, Buenos Aires, San Francisco and Seattle, to be loaded with cargoes of food for Belgium. These ships, provided with the proper passes by the Commission offices and by the representatives of the belligerent powers, were crossing the seas in rapid succession to carry to Rotterdam the food needed to keep Belgium from famine. The Commission, with the money obtained in England from the British and Belgian Governments and from the Belgian relief fund, had purchased many cargoes of wheat, maize, beans, rice and peas, to supplement the gift shipments. The service of supply was organised—not yet perfectly, for perfection could come only with time, but efficiently enough to deliver to Rotterdam sufficient food to meet the program agreed upon.

The organisation of the service of shipment from Rotterdam to Belgium, and of distribution inside Belgium, must now be discussed. At the same time that the London and New York offices of the Commission were arranging to secure and deliver food, the Rotterdam and Brussels offices had been creating the organisation necessary to get the food from Rotterdam to every commune in Belgium.

### THE ROTTERDAM OFFICE.

Captain Lucey and his Task at Rotterdam.—In looking about for someone to take charge of the Commission's affairs in Rotterdam, Hoover found in Captain Lucey a man who possessed the requisite experience, energy and force of character. Lucey was the head

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\* *Morning Post*, December 16, 1914.

of the Lucey Manufacturing Company, which before the war had furnished supplies to every oil-producing region of the world. He had served in the Spanish war, and was typical of the best sort of American business man. His instructions were laconic and general. He was to be the head of the Rotterdam branch of the Commission; was to take under his charge all the work of receiving, storing and shipping to Belgium the supplies to be delivered by the Commission in Rotterdam; was to get all possible information about conditions in Belgium, and to write a daily report giving such information as would make good 'copy' for the press service of the Commission. He was to confer with Hulse or Heimemann, who would come from Brussels, to make arrangements for the transmission of foodstuffs. The American Minister at The Hague and the Consul in Rotterdam were asked to lend him all possible assistance.\*

Lucey at Work.- On October 25, Lucey, in company with Shaler, left for Rotterdam, and, with characteristic energy, they set about at once arranging to carry out Hoover's instructions. They called on the American and German Consuls and were assured by them that they would co-operate gladly to help the Commission in its work. Van Dyke had already arranged with the Netherlands Government the necessary formalities for securing permits to send the Commission's food on into Belgium. One hundred and fifty safe-conduct passes, signed and stamped by the German authorities in Brussels, had already arrived at the German Consulate in Rotterdam. Many of the diplomatic formalities were thus already arranged.

Lucey and Shaler immediately got in touch with the Furness shipping firm and arranged to have them handle, for the time being, the supplies received and to provide transportation through to Brussels. A temporary office was established in their quarters and here Lucey immediately set to work, Shaler going on to Brussels to get in touch with the situation there. Lucey found at once that it would be impossible to ship by rail to Brussels. Antwerp had been taken less than three weeks before, and railway communications had not yet been reinstalled. The canal to Brussels via Antwerp was open for traffic, however, and arrangements were at once made to ship the first food-supplies by small steamers and lighters from Rotterdam to Brussels. On October 26 Lucey was able to cable London that he could unload a steamer in Rotterdam within three hours from the time it docked, and could deliver the food to Brussels in two or at most three days.

Canal Transport in Belgium.- At this point a word should be said about the canal transportation which made possible the solution of the problem of getting the food into Belgium at a time when all other means of transport were lacking. Belgium, like Holland, is covered with a network of canals. There were three main arteries from Holland into Belgium; the first was from Terneuzen and Sas van Ghent to Ghent. This canal was large enough to carry 1,200-ton lighters. In Ghent the cargoes of these large barges were transhipped into others of 300 and 400 tons burden, which were sent north to Ostend and Bruges, or south to Courtrai, Tournai, Lille, Valenciennes, Mons or Charleroi. The second main canal went from Rosendaal to Antwerp, and thence to Brussels or Louvain. This canal also was large enough for lighters of a thousand tons burden. The chief Belgian flour mills were located at Louvain or near Brussels, and hence a large part of the new wheat to be introduced was sent to Louvain or Brussels to be milled. The flour was reshipped from the mills by canal or rail, for distribution in the Brabant, Luxembourg and, later on, also in

\* Hoover to Lucey, October 24, 1914.

Northern France. From Antwerp also lighters could be sent via Termonde and Ath to Mons and neighbouring destinations. The third canal went from Rotterdam via Dordrecht and Weert into Belgian Limbourg. This canal branched, westward to Turnhout and Antwerp, southward into Holland again at Maastricht, and then back into Belgium to Liège and Namur. If the water was neither too high nor too low, lighters could be sent from Namur along the Sambre to Charleroi, or south on the Meuse to Dinant, and ultimately to Charleville. All the chief centres of Belgium and all the provinces, save Luxembourg, could therefore be provided with food directly from Rotterdam via the canals. Water transportation is always cheaper than rail, and at this time conditions made it possible for the Rotterdam office to charter lighters at a rate lower even than that which prevailed in times of peace. Most of the enormous pre-war transport between Holland and Belgium or Germany had ceased to exist. There were, therefore, hundreds of Dutch lightermen idle, and the Commission at first had little difficulty in securing sufficient canal barges to carry its food into Belgium. There were also in Holland hundreds of Belgian lighters which had been sent into Holland during the period of the occupation to escape seizure by the Germans. After considerable negotiation the Commission was ultimately able to obtain permission from the Germans to use these barges. The Germans issued passes permitting the Belgian lightermen, not only to enter Belgium, but also to return to Holland. With this guarantee the Commission were able to charter many of the Belgian barges. Later on, as the Commission's work grew, the difficulty of securing lighters to carry food into Belgium and between points in Belgium became very great. This difficulty ultimately led to the creation of a special service of the Commission in Belgium, the Ship Owning Department, familiarly known as the S.O.D., through which the Commission became the nominal owner of most of the lighters in its service. This development, however, came much later.

Lucey at first arranged to charter the necessary lighters through the Furness Company. Because of their local knowledge and experience in canal shipping they were able to organise without delay the necessary warehousing facilities in Rotterdam, and to provide the lighters needed. In a very few days these matters were arranged, and the Rotterdam office was in a position to handle the supplies as rapidly as they should arrive.

Reports as to the situation in Belgium.—Lucey also set about getting all available information in regard to conditions in Belgium. He met the Belgian Vice-Consul at Rotterdam, and through him came into contact with the delegations that had been sent from Liège, Namur, Charleroi and other places to attempt to secure food in Holland. They described to him the distress prevailing in the populous centres in Belgium. With the information he was able to gather in this way, it was possible for him to write to Hoover daily reports which gave much needed details of the situation in Belgium. Many of these reports were sent out by the Associated Press and were widely published.

Relations with the Brussels Committees.—In order to establish close co-operation with the Comité Central and with Heinemann's committee, Shaler went to Brussels on October 27. On the same day M. Van den Branden, a Belgian associated with the Solvay Company, arrived in Rotterdam to represent the Belgian committee in the Rotterdam office. He brought no definite instructions as to shipping, however, nor as to destinations to which the first shipments should be directed. Captain Lucey began almost at once to be discouraged and irritated by the lack of such definite instructions from Brussels. Before shipments could be sent into Belgium, he had to have detailed information about the way

the food should be divided between the various regions, about the size of lighters that could be used on each canal, and about the condition of the various canals. Many of the waterways had been blocked in the first weeks of the war by blown-up bridges or sunken barges, and without definite information from Brussels, Lucey was unable to know to which points the canals could be used. Days and even weeks passed before this information was forthcoming and Lucey became very impatient. The reports that came from Belgium made him feel that thousands of people might be starving in Belgium, while food was being held at Rotterdam because of the lack of instructions from Brussels.

**The First Shipment to Brussels.**—The first supplies received in Rotterdam were the cargoes of the 'Coblentz' and 'Iris,' which arrived on November 1 and 2 respectively. These cargoes, consisting of the 1,777 tons of flour, the 414 tons of rice, and the 210 tons of beans and peas that had been purchased by Shaler, were delivered in Brussels forty-eight hours after their arrival in Rotterdam. Marshall Langhorne, secretary of the American Legation at The Hague, went to Brussels at the same time to make sure the shipments arrived safely and without delay. He was accompanied by Jarvis Bell, who had been sent over by Hoover to assist Lucey, and by Wyman, European manager of the American Express Company. They endeavoured to get more definite information about conditions in Belgium, but found the Comité National not yet fully organised, and the Heinemann Committee swamped in the details of the difficult and delicate work of trying to arrange with the Germans a satisfactory basis for the successful execution of the work.

**Communications with Brussels.**—In the course of the next fortnight the Rotterdam office received numerous visits from representatives of the Comité Central. Mr. Heinemann came himself on November 7, and gave Lucey reassuring news about the extension of the organisation of the Comité Central which had become officially on November 5 the Comité National. He also reported that in order to meet temporary shortages of foodstuffs in Belgium he had made an arrangement with the military authorities to borrow from them 50,000 sacks of grain—i.e. 5,000 tons—which had been captured in Antwerp by the Germans. This was to be sent to the larger urban areas which were in danger of running short of bread. The Germans had offered to provide further quantities on a similar basis if such should be needed. The understanding, however, was that the Commission would later on replace the quantities thus borrowed.

On November 1 the first trip of the Commission courier was made from Rotterdam to Brussels, when Captain Lucey sent E. D. Curtis with a letter to Whitlock, and with urgent request for reports as to the organisation being effected within Belgium. Arrangements had been made with the German authorities by which the Commission was permitted to send its mail into Belgium by special courier. A special censorship service was maintained by the Germans to aid the Commission's work, and to keep a close watch upon it. This first trip of Curtis marked the beginning of the organisation of communication by the Commission.

While Lucey was waiting for the detailed information from Belgium necessary for the complete organisation of the shipping department of his office, he was very busy searching Holland for food-supplies available for immediate shipment to Belgium.

**Food-supplies secured in Holland.**—Monsieur Rolin-Hymans, a representative of the Comité Central, had come to Rotterdam on October 28 with authorisation to buy the cargoes of wheat in Belgian lighters that had been brought into Holland from Antwerp at the time of the bombardment. There were over 8,000 tons of such wheat in Holland.

The Belgian Government, through its Minister at The Hague, had put all such wheat belonging to it at the disposition of the Comité Central, and M. Rolin-Hymans had secured from the German authorities the permission to import this wheat into Belgium. In addition to the lighters with grain belonging to the Belgian Government there were some 2,500 tons belonging to private individuals in Holland. In many cases it was very difficult to discover the real owners of this grain. Captain Lucey and the Belgian representatives tried, wherever possible, to find the owners and to buy the grain with funds provided in Rotterdam by the Comité Central. The first rule of the Rotterdam office, however, was to get results, and Captain Lucey spared no efforts to round up any available foodstuffs. It is to be suspected, therefore, that recalcitrant lightermen were perhaps bullied into returning to Belgium or turning over their wheat to the Commission, even before the real ownership was determined; for, after all, it did not much matter to Captain Lucey to what particular Belgian the wheat belonged—it was at least owned by Belgians and was certainly badly needed in Belgium. The insignificant question of ownership could be settled when there was leisure for such detail.

The Dutch Government was applied to for a loan of 10,000 tons of wheat, to be replaced as soon as the Commission's supplies began to arrive regularly, and through the representations of Mr. Hoover, of the Belgian Minister and of the American Minister to the Netherlands Government, this request was ultimately granted in the early part of December. Some 20,000 tons of wheat were therefore secured in Holland in November and December to meet the immediate needs in Belgium and to bridge over the period which should elapse before the regular importations began to arrive. As Lucey had pointed out in a letter written to Hoover, October 29, 'the great and urgent necessity is for wheat or flour. If we could get about 25,000 tons we could relieve the immediate necessity.' The quantities secured from Holland, while insufficient to meet the needs of all the Belgians, were yet sufficient to prevent any great distress in the more populous areas which were in greatest danger of food famine.

Delays in obtaining Permission to Ship to Belgium. When the first shipments came to be made from Rotterdam, the British and French Ministers, apparently not yet informed of the permits received by the Commission, objected to the shipments being made. The British Minister very soon withdrew his objection on advice from London, but it was not until the State Department at Washington had taken up the matter with the French Government through the Ambassador in Paris that the French Minister was authorised to permit shipments of the Commission to go into Belgium.\*

In the week from November 2 to 9 the Rotterdam office under Lucey's direction was able to send into Brussels 1,300 tons of wheat acquired by the Brussels committee from the stocks that had been sent out from Antwerp in the early part of October. Seven thousand additional tons of this wheat were purchased, but there was some delay in getting these into Belgium because of the lack of proper instructions from the Belgian Minister at The Hague. Practically all this wheat was sent into Belgium before the end of the month, however, the greater part going to Brussels, but considerable quantities were also sent to Charleroi and Liège.

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\* See dispatches State Department to Herrick, October 31, 1914, and of Herrick to State Department, November 11, 1914, as quoted in the *Am. J. Int. Law*, ix, p. 318.

On November 9 the ship 'Jan Blockx' arrived from London with a cargo of 2,000 tons of wheat, flour, rice, beans and peas, donated by the municipality of Ostend. Within 36 hours this whole cargo was on its way to Belgium, three lighters being sent to Brussels, one to Ostend and two train shipments to Liège.

The First Shipment to Liège.—The first shipment to be sent by the Commission to Liège went on the first of these trains which left Rotterdam at five in the morning of November 10, under the personal escort of Captain Sunderland, the American military attaché at The Hague. This train arrived in Liège the same evening.

Sunderland's Comments on the Situation in Belgium.—Sunderland's comments upon the situation at Liège are interesting, because they reveal the chaos and lack of organisation which existed at this time inside Belgium. He said: 'There seemed to me a great lack of organisation in the relief work in Liège. The consul, the burgomaster, and all authorities seemed greatly to regret the absence in Brussels of one Paul Van Hoegarden, of whom I had never heard before my visit to Liège. Owing to the strained relations which necessarily exist between the Belgians and the German officials it seems to me that it would greatly facilitate the operations of the Commission were all the work in connection with the relief, short of the actual distribution, put in the hands of an American to be stationed at Liège to represent the Relief Commission. Such a man could investigate the needs of the different localities, and communicate this to the Rotterdam office, could meet shipments coming in and pre-arrange payment of freight or any other details, and thus prevent confusion similar to that which attended the arrival of the shipment I accompanied and which will attend, in my estimation, every shipment under the present regime. There seemed too many persons involved in this work of relief in Liège, and no man seemed to have sufficient authority to obtain any tangible results.'\*

Why the Brussels Office could not organise quickly.—Innumerable similar incidents could be related of the work of relief in those first days of the Commission, in November and December, 1914. While the organisation of shipments and the distribution of food was still only half accomplished, a whole system of communication and transport had to be established. All the ordinary business conveniences were lacking. The Rotterdam services were naturally organised before those inside Belgium. The Netherlands Government and its chief officials were always courteous and helpful and gave invaluable aid. They gave free use of the state telegraph lines to the Commission, and agreed to transport free of charge a definite quantity of food daily from Rotterdam to Liège. Special instructions were forwarded to the frontier officials to expedite the shipments for Belgium. Furthermore, Holland had never been invaded. Its normal life continued; business could be transacted as usual. In Belgium, however, everything was utterly different, and it was physically impossible to effect organisation as quickly as in Holland. The occupation of the country by a hostile army, the constant frictions between the population and their rulers, the suspicion on both sides, made the Germans slow to grant any concessions from their rigid military regime. The absence of means of communication, the great restriction of circulation—passports being at that time required even to go from one region to another—the breakdown of the credit system, the paralysis of industry, the spiritual and physical shock that still weighed heavily upon the people, made any attempt at organisation a slow and difficult process.

\* Report of Captain Sunderland to Lucey, November 14, 1914.



Lucey's Irritation at Brussels' Delay.—During these first weeks there developed at times considerable irritation between Captain Lucey and his office in Rotterdam and the committee in Brussels, but as soon as each office understood better the difficulties of the other the early irritation wore off, and the work was soon running more smoothly. The chief difficulties that existed could not, however, be overcome without the creation of the machinery for co-operation.

The need for a Strong Representation of the Commission in Belgium.—In order to accomplish this, it was necessary that the Commission should be strongly represented inside Belgium. It had to have a central office at Brussels, co-operating with the Comité National, and American delegates who would be stationed in the various provinces. The Americans in Brussels at this time, Messrs. Heinemann and Hulse, hardly realised the urgent necessity of closer co-operation with their colleagues in London and Rotterdam, so absorbed were they in daily negotiations with the German authorities about passes, transportation guarantees and permissions of various kinds. The Commission was really not yet established in Brussels, and there were as yet no delegates to supervise distribution, to maintain communications, and to collect the information so badly needed by the Commission. The final organisation of the Brussels office will be described in the next chapter.

Arrivals in Rotterdam from Overseas.—The first boat to arrive in Rotterdam from across the Atlantic was the 'Tremorvah,' which arrived on November 15 with a cargo of 5,000 tons of all kinds of food donated by Nova Scotia. On November 21 the 'Massapequa' arrived in Rotterdam from New York with a cargo of 3,500 tons, donated by the Rockefeller Foundation. From this time on the arrivals were fairly frequent, and the supply of food was to pour into Belgium in constantly increasing quantities. In the month of November a total of 26,431 tons of food was discharged in Rotterdam. In December, 17 ships brought a total of 58,000 tons, while in January 20 ships were received of a total tonnage of, roughly, 70,000 tons. From that time on the monthly arrivals were seldom less than the 75,000 tons agreed on as the minimum required by Belgium, and often this figure was greatly exceeded. In May, 1915, 36 ships brought 125,000 tons to Rotterdam and in October, 1915, in a single month 44 ships discharged a total of 135,000 tons. During the first year of the Commission's operation 186 full and 308 partial cargoes were delivered in Rotterdam. The total quantities of supplies received by the Rotterdam office during the first year reached the total of 988,852 tons.

The Rotterdam Office and its Achievements.—The Rotterdam office, organised so quickly and so effectively by Captain Lucey, was able to handle the increasing tonnage with speed and economy. After three weeks of work in the office of Furness & Co., Captain Lucey established the office of the Commission in commodious quarters at 98, Haringvliet, Rotterdam, on November 21. Capable and energetic men had been secured to handle the various departments. Mr. J. M. Haak took over the management of the details of the office work. Mr. Van der Sluis proved an invaluable man at the head of the shipping department, and rendered great services to the Commission in organising the lighter service to Belgium and in arranging the transshipping facilities so as to secure the discharge of cargoes in record time. Co-operating with the Commission manager was Mr. Van den Branden, the representative of the Comité National, whose work was largely concerned with the supervising the financial operations of the office. Captain Lucey and his successor, Mr. C. A. Young, of the Lucey Company, who came from Rumania early in December to succeed Lucey as the head of the Rotterdam office, had every reason to

be satisfied with the result achieved by that office. It was a tradition of the Rotterdam office that it was infallible. This claim to pre-eminence in efficiency used frequently to cause a certain friendly irritation to the Commission's representatives in Belgium, when they would be rebuked by Rotterdam for making blunders, and would have their own complaints ignored by that office.

The work of the Rotterdam office stands, however, as a striking accomplishment in business efficiency. It handled shipments in Rotterdam at an average cost of 9d. per ton, a figure much lower than had been achieved at Rotterdam even in peace-times. It controlled a fleet of 495 lighters at a similarly lower expense than the normal figure in peace-times, and delivered food into Belgium via the canals at an average cost of  $\frac{4}{3}$  farthing per ton-kilometre. These figures speak better than any words for the manner in which the work was done. In a later chapter and in the proper place the details of the results obtained by the Rotterdam office will be more fully discussed.

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## CHAPTER IV

## THE ORGANISATION OF FOOD DISTRIBUTION IN BELGIUM

## THE ORGANISATION OF THE COMITÉ NATIONAL

During the period in which the Commission was creating its services outside Belgium to provide a regular food supply for that country, the committees in Brussels were exerting their best efforts to complete the organisation of distribution inside Belgium.

As soon as Francqui arrived in Brussels, he set to work drawing up a program of the monthly needs of Belgium. In a telegram to Hoover, dated October 26, he said that the minimum monthly importations that would meet the requirements of the Belgian situation were as follows :

Wheat or flour	..	..	60,000	tons
Maize	..	..	15,000	„
Rice	..	..	3,000	„
Beans or peas	..	..	3,000	„

This estimate was approved and endorsed by the American and Spanish Ministers in Brussels.

Conditions in Belgium.—At the same time Francqui wrote to Hoover a full report of the Belgian situation. ‘On returning here,’ he said, ‘I found the situation much more grave than when I left. Liège, Namur, Charleroi are absolutely without flour. At Brussels we can scarcely finish the week, and we shall be under the necessity of allowing only 100 grams of flour per day and *per capita*. In the whole country there are only a few thousand sacks of wheat left. It is therefore necessary that our population should be fed completely from without if we are to be saved from death by starvation. In normal times there are in Belgium nearly eight million people to feed ; in mentioning therefore 60,000 tons of wheat as being the minimum quantity, you will see that my estimate will give only 200 grams of flour per person.’

Financial Problems.—One of the first and most difficult questions to be approached by Francqui was that of the finances of the relief work. The program for monthly importations which he had mentioned would necessitate the expenditure of approximately one million pounds monthly. There must be a working capital to cover at least two months’ supplies, since the time required for transport to and inside Belgium was such that at least two months’ supplies would always be on seas or at the warehouses. After considerable efforts he was able to secure a loan from the Brussels bankers of £600,000 to add to the £200,000 received from the British Government and from the Belgian relief fund. He also took steps to bring pressure upon the Belgian Government in order to secure from them a sum of money sufficient to provide the necessary working capital for the Commission. He hoped also to secure through a rather complicated exchange arrangement a considerable monthly contribution from the Belgian Government. Before any such arrangement could be made effective, however, the consent of both the German and the allied governments

had to be obtained. The Belgian Government agreed early in November to advance one million pounds to the Commission as working capital and as a transportation fund. The later negotiations for a subsidy from the Belgian Government and for the establishment of the exchange arrangements will be described in the next chapter.

**The October 29 Meeting of the Comité Central.**—On October 29 a general meeting of the Comité Central was called. The heads of the various provincial committees were invited to attend, and there were also present at the meeting delegates from the various provinces in which the committees had not yet been organised.

Francqui gave a report of the trip to London and of the conferences by which the provisionment of Belgium had been assured. He described the various negotiations, and outlined the plan agreed upon by the Commission. He assured them that the diplomatic patrons would undertake the protection of the food which would be imported by the Commission, and that on this condition the British Government was willing to consent to the importation. He paid high tribute to the part played in organising the Belgian relief work by the ambassadors of Spain and the United States in London and Brussels and by the Commission. ‘As you perceive,’ he said, ‘the devoted intervention of these men, and especially of Hoover, Gibson and Shaler, has greatly facilitated the accomplishment of our task.’

Solvay, in addressing the meeting from the chair, gave expression to the relief felt in all Belgium at the good tidings brought back by Francqui. ‘The Belgian population was on the verge of famine and the inquietude was general, because we foresaw dimly terrible days, frightful and perhaps irreparable events. Thanks to the precious and devoted intervention of the neutral diplomats and of the American Commission we are free, at least for the moment, from the threat of the fresh calamities which hung over our heads.’

Solvay sketched the outlines upon which the work of the new national organisation must be based. He emphasised the necessity of putting aside all political activities, and of insisting upon absolute impartiality in the distribution of food and of relief. The committee had not only to feed the population, but also to assist in every possible way those who had become victims of the fearful crisis through which Belgium was passing. Solvay therefore welcomed the presidents of the provincial committees, and called upon them to insist in their organisations on the same sentiments of impartial action and patriotic devotion to the common task as those which governed the action of the National Committee.

The scheme for the distribution of food throughout Belgium was outlined at this meeting. It was provided that, until the new organisation could be established and the regular imports began, each provincial committee should perfect a definite organisation to take over the provisionment of its province. Each committee should also use every means to relieve the need of the population temporarily with local resources, until the imports should begin to arrive in sufficient quantities to make possible general distribution.

**The Scheme of Organisation of the Comité National.**—On October 31 delegates were appointed by the Comité National to represent the committee in the various provinces, to act with the provincial committees and to supervise their operations in such a way as to make sure that the instructions of the central committee would be carried out. At the meeting of these delegates plans were discussed for the organisation of the work inside Belgium. A scheme finally agreed upon was presented to the executive committee of the Comité Central on November 5 and was approved by it. The plan thus adopted formed

the basis of the organisation of the Comité National. The chief features of the plan for the reorganisation of the Comité Central were :

(1) The Comité Central should continue as before, composed of the same members and under the patronage of the Spanish and American Ministers. Its name, henceforth, should be : 'Comité National de Secours et d'Alimentation.'

(2) The composition of the Comité Exécutif should likewise remain as before, and this committee should retain the same power of general administration as it had held under the regime of the Comité Central of Brussels.

(3) It was stated that 'to aid in the work of the executive committee, two new organisms have been created : Le Comité Hispano-Américain, or Commission for Relief in Belgium,' and the provincial committees. The Comité National was to maintain close relations with these bodies. It should supervise the work of the provincial committees through its delegates, and should maintain intimate co-operation with the offices of the Commission for Relief in Belgium through its representatives assigned to these offices.

(4) The Comité National would centralise the accounts, fix the price of merchandise, and look after the payment of supplies sold to the provincial committees.

(5) The Commission was to have offices in each of the provinces under the charge of delegates of American nationality, who should be assigned to work with the provincial committees. These delegates should act in co-operation with the delegates of the Comité National : they should reside in the chief place of the province, and should visit even the smallest hamlet to ensure the efficient working of the organisation.

(6) In each province and in Greater Brussels, which, because of its importance, was treated as a separate province, a provincial committee was to be established. The members of these committees should be impartially chosen, and the committee should include representatives of each political party, and from each arrondissement so that the needs of all sections and districts would be known to the committees. The provincial committees should maintain constant communication with the Comité National, but should enjoy entire independence of action except for the general measures prescribed by the Comité National. They should assume the responsibility of an equitable distribution of food and a wise administration of charity. The Comité National would assign delegates to each provincial committee, and each committee in turn should nominate some one resident in Brussels to represent them and to make the necessary payments in their behalf. Each committee should maintain at the Société Générale a running account with sufficient funds to cover at least one month's shipments of food (the sums to be deposited were fixed tentatively for each province).

The Organisation of Sub-Committees.— In the first chapter the organisation of the various provincial committees has already been described. By the end of November these committees were actually in operation in every province in Belgium. The process of organisation was necessarily a slow and difficult one, but as the relief supplies were already beginning to arrive by the middle of November, it was urgently necessary to complete the plans for food distribution to the communes and to the population as rapidly as possible. Regional committees were called into existence in all the chief centres, and efforts were

likewise made to secure the formation in each commune of a provisioning committee (comité d'alimentation) and of a relief committee (comité de secours) to administer the distribution to the population of the food and the charitable funds available. In the area of the General Government this work of preliminary organisation was completed by the end of December. The situation in the Flanders was more difficult because both Flanders were in the etappen zone and suffered under even greater restrictions of communication than the other provinces. The question of provisioning Flanders was also complicated by the fact that they were not included in the guarantees given by the Governor-General as they were outside his jurisdiction. Before the work of relief could be extended to the Flanders and the other etappen areas, special guarantees had to be obtained from the commanders of the armies concerned.

**Relief Operations Extended to French Regions.**—The question of extending the relief work to France was first raised in the middle of November. Two French areas, the district of Maubeuge and the tongue-like strip of the Meuse valley, the Givet-Fumay region, which is surrounded on both sides by Belgian territory, had been attached by the Germans for administrative purposes to the territory of the Belgian General Government. They were thus cut off from receiving any supplies from the parts in France in the etappen area. The mayor of Maubeuge came to Brussels to seek to find the food which was badly needed in the region about Maubeuge. On November 19 he wrote to Whitlock describing the misery existing in his district, and asking that the operations of the relief organisations be extended to include Maubeuge. A week later the General Government referred to the Ministers and to Mr. Heinemann a similar request from the Givet-Fumay area. The negotiations that followed will be fully described in the chapter that is devoted to the beginning of the relief work in France. It is sufficient to observe here that ultimately the Governor-General gave the same guarantees for these regions in regard to the protection of imported food that he had already given for Belgium. On this basis the Commission and the Comité National decided to provide these French regions with food under the same conditions as applied to the Belgian provinces. For administrative purposes, Maubeuge was attached to Western and Central Hainaut, and the Givet-Fumay region was attached to the province of Namur. These arrangements were not finally completed until the early part of January, but from the beginning of December the program of relief included provisions for the supplying of these French districts.

**Relations with the German Authorities.**—One of the first and most delicate problems to be attacked by the relief organisations in Belgium was that of the relations to be maintained between the German authorities and the relief bodies. The success of the whole work depended to a very great degree upon the attitude of the military power toward the work. The Governor-General, it is true, had promised his assistance, and had given assurances of his sympathy, but many details had yet to be arranged before the organisation of the shipping service inside Belgium and of the system of distribution could be effectively completed. The chief part in the negotiations with the Governor-General and his staff fell naturally to the Ministers and to the representatives of the Commission, Messrs. Heinemann and Hulse. After various consultations as to the co-operation needed from the side of the occupying authorities, a letter was sent on November 10 to the Governor-General by the Ministers, explaining the situation and outlining the concessions that must be made by the Germans before the relief work could be permanently established. The Ministers stated the terms on which the British Government had consented to food

being sent to Belgium, and added that they would become a party to any agreement made affecting the relief work, not in their diplomatic capacity, but in their honorary position as patrons of the Commission and of the Comité National. The following day the Comité National sent to the Ministers a memorandum outlining in detail the concessions to be obtained from the Germans :

Concessions requested by the Comité National.—(1) All requisitions of cereals should be suspended until the inventories that were being taken of the existing stocks should be completed. If, as seemed certain, these inventories should show that the total stocks were not sufficient to permit the distribution of 350 grams of flour per day to the civil population for a period of 100 days, the German Government should be asked to relinquish any further requisitions.

(2) The Germans should permit the free circulation of all merchandise imported by the Commission. Instructions should be given to all officers and officials in the territory of the General Government, explaining to them in detail the agreements of the Governor-General and the work of the relief organisations. The German Government should take steps to free the canals and rivers from obstructions, and should permit the use of railroads in the areas which could not be served by canal. The greatest possible freedom of communication must be permitted to the various committees inside Belgium to enable them to carry on their business. The Commission should be permitted the unrestricted use of the telegraph service, especially with Holland.

(3) The third and last point taken up in this memorandum was that of the finances of the Comité National. It was pointed out that the sums of moneys, secured through private exchange of a sort that had been agreed to by the Governor-General and by the German Commissioner of Banks on November 5, would be altogether insufficient to provide the Commission in London with the funds necessary to continue for any long period the purchase of the monthly program agreed upon. It was pointed out also that if subsidies from the Belgian Government could be obtained for the Commission in London, much of the financial difficulty would disappear. But these subsidies could only be obtained if the Germans would permit the equivalent sums to be paid out in Belgium by the Comité National in the interest of the Belgian Government from the money obtained from the sale of foodstuffs in Belgium. The Comité National would make payments to the communes and to functionaries and employees of the Belgian Government.\*

The General Government's Reply.—The Ministers forwarded this memorandum to the Governor-General with an appeal for favourable action in the various matters touched upon. On November 21, Dr. von Sandt, replying to the Ministers, said that the Governor-General wished to renew the assurance of his hearty co-operation with the relief work. With regard to the particular request of the Comité National, the General Government was willing, first, to order the suspension of all requisitions of cereals until December 10, at which time the inventory should be completed; second, the German Government was unable to give a general assurance that the railways could be used, but would undertake to act favourably on any request from the Comité National for permission to make particular

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\* Letter of Comité National to Whitlock, November 11, 1914.

shipments. Third, that the Governor-General was willing to permit considerable liberty to the relief committees in the matter of communications, and von Sandt himself would receive and transmit to the German Consul at Rotterdam all telegrams of the Commission.

**An Army Order Relating to the Work of Relief.**—In compliance with the request of the Ministers and of the Comité National, Dr. von Sandt also issued on November 16 a special army order, describing in detail the relief organisations and their projected work, and calling the attention of all officials in the territory of the General Government to the privileges and immunities that had been conferred by the Governor-General on the relief bodies. This order recapitulated the guarantees against any form of requisition of imported food, and stated that the committees were operating under the patronage of the neutral Ministers. The second paragraph of the order stated that the forwarding of supplies from Rotterdam was directed by Captain Lucey of the American Committee; that all storehouses would be under American protection and administered by an American; that the work of importation was to be assisted in every way by all officials concerned; and that proper accommodations were to be provided for those in charge of the distribution of relief supplies.

The third paragraph was devoted to an extensive explanation of the various Belgian committees of the communes, regions and provinces. It was provided that the chairmen of the various committees and the members of the provincial committees should receive every possible assistance from military and civil officials in the matter of the issuance of passports, and especially in providing ways of communication.

The fourth paragraph stated that the exemption from requisition granted in case of imported supplies applied also to such quantities as would be loaned to the Comité National by the German Government to relieve the immediate necessities of various regions.

As can be seen from these instructions, the German authorities at this time were favourably disposed toward the relief work, and were inclined to make every concession possible compatible with the military situation. The Governor-General, Baron von der Goltz, had from the first favoured a policy of conciliation, and had tried to restore so far as possible the normal life of the country. He and his chief assistants had been very seriously concerned at the prospects of a food famine in Belgium, and no one had welcomed more gladly than they the creation of relief organisations which would be able to import food for the population.

**The Governor-General's Letter of November 14.**—A very interesting letter, sent by von der Goltz to Minister Whitlock on November 14, illustrates his eagerness to see the relief work put upon a permanent basis. Among other things he said: 'I am informed that the Comité Central has decided to extend its operations and to provide, as far as possible, for feeding and clothing the civil population of the whole of Belgium.

'As your Excellency knows, Belgium in ordinary times produces only about one-sixth of the amount of flour necessary for its maintenance. Under existing conditions, with practically no work being done in the country, with crops abandoned and with import stopped, your Excellency will realise that the question of feeding the civil population has become extremely serious.'

He went on to state that he had been informed of the purchases already made in England, and said that the military authorities had given positive instructions that these supplies should be reserved exclusively to the civil population.



'While this consignment relieves the situation, the relief is, of course, only temporary, and, in the interest of all concerned, an effort must be made to effect some permanent arrangement whereby foodstuffs purchased abroad may be brought for an indefinite period into Belgium upon the distinct understanding that they shall be devoted exclusively to the use of the civil population. . . . The Imperial Government is prepared to offer the most formal assurances that any supplies imported will be scrupulously respected by the German military and civil authorities, and will be exempt from all seizure and requisition. Possession, control and disposition of all these supplies will be left entirely in the hands of the Comité National or its designated agents. It is hoped that in view of the acute situation in Belgium and the assurances I had the honour to communicate to your Excellency, His Britannic Majesty's Government will be prepared to permit the free importation into Belgium of such supplies as may from time to time be purchased by the committee under your Excellency's patronage.

'When informed that His Britannic Majesty's Government is prepared to agree to such an arrangement, the Imperial German Government will not only order that the supplies imported for the civil population will be respected, *but will further stop all requisitions of foodstuffs in Belgium.* Thus the total amount of foodstuffs which Belgium is able to produce will be left to meet the needs of the civil population.

'I have ventured to offer to your Excellency the foregoing assurances on behalf of the Imperial Government, not only because of the fact that your Excellency is charged with protecting German interests in Belgium, but also because I feel that in view of the disinterested and neutral position of the United States no promise could be of more solemn and binding character for Germany than when offered to a representative of the United States Government. I venture, therefore, to appeal to your Excellency to bring the foregoing considerations to the attention of His Britannic Majesty's Government and to use your good offices to assure the acceptance of an arrangement such as I have suggested.\*

It was thus by the specific request of the German Government that the American Minister and the Commission undertook the further negotiations to be described in detail in the next chapter for the establishment of the work of relief in Belgium on a permanent basis.

The Frankenburg Incident.- The same spirit was manifested by the German authorities in Belgium a few days later when an incident occurred which for the moment seemed to seriously threaten the relief work. The *New York Times*, in an article of one of its European correspondents, published November 22, had stated that His Excellency von Frankenburg and Ludwigsdorf, personal adjutant to the military governor of Antwerp, when interviewed, had scouted the idea that the people of Belgium were on the brink of starvation as the result of German occupation. He said that the very contrary was the case; that, while Belgium was not self-sustaining in its food-supply, imports had been obtained in Holland and elsewhere, and that 'an inter-communal commission had been organised at our suggestion and that all districts are being supplied. If America had not been so tender-hearted as to send foodstuffs, and if the food-supply had not run out, we should certainly have considered it our duty to bring food from Germany, for we are for the time being the government here and it is our duty to see that the people do not starve.'

Hoover and the Commission immediately demanded an explanation from the

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\* Letter of the Governor-General, Baron von der Goltz, to Whitlock, November 14, 1914.

German Government of this statement, declaring that 'if it is true that the Germans intend to feed Belgium, America will withdraw instantly.'\* The German Consul in Rotterdam immediately handed Captain Lucey a telegram from the German Government to the effect that 'the statement reported to have been made by von Frankenburg is not true, and the Imperial German Government thankfully acknowledges American relief, without which the distress in Belgium would be much greater, and wishes that the relief be continued.' †

On the same day Whitlock wrote to Hoover stating that the General Government had assured him that there was no basis in fact for the reported statement. 'It seems that a Captain von Frankenburg, a staff-officer, not authorised to speak, made statements to some person, claiming to be a newspaper man, relating to conditions in Germany, in which he said that there was no danger of starvation in Germany, and that Germany wanted no assistance in feeding its population. His remarks were therefore evidently entirely misunderstood. The German Government renews its official declaration that conditions in Belgium are as they have been represented, and views with great gratification the generous efforts of the American people to relieve the starving population here.'

The Imperial German Government issued on November 25 an official statement declaring that the starvation of Belgium would be due to the action of the Allies in cutting off Belgium's normal imports and that Germany could not and would not feed Belgium in view of the character of the allied blockade. The Berlin Government, however, reaffirmed the declaration of the Governor-General in Belgium that 'the German Government is entirely in sympathy with the laudable work of the American Commission for Relief in Belgium.'

From these several statements there can be no doubt that the German authorities in Berlin, as in Brussels, were at first thoroughly in accord with the work of the Commission and were disposed to aid it in every possible way.

The Germans Approve the Exchange Plan.—The plan for the expenditure by the Comité National in Belgium of funds on the account of the Belgian Government was finally and definitely approved by the German authorities at the end of November. Whitlock, writing to Page on December 1, said: 'I am glad to be able to inform you that the German authorities have given me their assurances that they have not the slightest objection to the arrangements, that it has their entire support, that they will respect it in every particular, and that in its execution it will meet with no interference from them whatever. The German authorities are as anxious as anyone that we succeed in our undertaking and the documents can easily be procured. Any assurance that you may find it necessary to give to the Belgian or to the British Government may be given in all confidence either in your name or in mine.'

The Situation on December 1, 1914.—By the first of December the committees working in Brussels had been able to secure from the German authorities the preliminary assurances necessary to establishing the relief work on a more or less permanent basis. Within the same period they had also organised the work of food distribution throughout the country. The various provincial committees were working actively in every province. Committees had been formed in practically all the communes. The principles upon which the relief activities were based were such as to leave to the local and provincial committees large powers of independent action to permit them to fit the scheme of food distribution

\* Hoover to Whitlock, November 23, 1914.

† From telegram of Lucey to Hoover, November 27, 1914.

to the peculiar problems of the locality. Nearly 5,000 committees were ultimately co-operating under the headship of the Comité National to assure the distribution of food and of relief.

The first supplies received in November were insufficient in quantity to meet the needs of the whole population, and were divided between the districts where the foodstocks were lowest, such as Greater Brussels, Liège, Mous and Charleroi. When the receipts of food became more considerable, it was decided that the only possible means of fair repartition was to arrange to have the food shipped from Rotterdam directly to the provinces on a fixed percentage basis. This percentage table was drawn up by the Comité National, approved by the Commission and put into effect early in December. Thereafter the Rotterdam office divided each shipment received according to this percentage table.

First Meetings of the Comité National.—The arrangements for the detailed carrying out of the relief program were thoroughly discussed at meetings of the Comité National held on November 24 and 26. Representatives from all the provinces were present at these meetings, and the Comité Exécutif gave definite instructions as to how the food should be handled and distributed. Francqui explained the financial details which had been agreed upon in order to establish the relief work on a practical basis. The benevolent aspect of the work involved a rather complicated accounting system. Many cargoes of gift foods had been turned over to the Commission for distribution in Belgium, many other cargoes had been purchased by the Commission. The food obtained from these sources was put together in the warehouses of the Commission. It was therefore practically impossible to distribute gratuitously the gift foods to the poor, while at the same time selling to the well-to-do the supplies which had been purchased. The destitute in many cases needed a great many other things in addition to the gift foods. They needed native supplies as well and these had to be bought for them in Belgium. The children needed milk and the sick had to have medical care that had to be provided by the local relief committees.

The Use of Gift Foods and Funds.—As stated in the Commission's report: 'It was quickly found that from the enormous size of the problem and the physical circumstances of its solution, it was wholly impracticable to distribute these identical gifts to the destitute. The gifts in actual food were of varied character and of irregular arrival, and the continuous supply necessary for the canteens could not be assured on this basis. In any case the gifts would have to be supplemented by purchase. Furthermore, the distribution of an actual gift cargo in thousands of canteens would involve a complete duplication in the system of transportation and distribution developed for the sale of food to the self-supporting: a large proportion of the gift food was in the nature of luxuries from a Belgian point of view and had less food-value than would be obtained if these articles should be sold to the well-to-do and the money obtained devoted to the purchase of cheaper and proportionately more nourishing food.' It was therefore determined that all gift food should be turned over to the provisioning department at its full value and thus be added to the general stream. The value of the gift foods was determined on a basis of the cost of replacing them at the time they were given to the Commission and the benevolent department was credited with the estimated values.

The Operations of the Benevolent Department. The benevolent department made use of the sums with which it was credited to subsidise the provincial relief committees and to contribute to the maintenance of a great variety of charitable enterprises. The

provincial relief committees received regular monthly subsidies from the Comité National, and these were added to the profits derived locally from the sale of relief food to the well-to-do. The greater part of the relief funds were actually distributed by the communal committees, which were subsidised in turn by the provincial committees. In every commune there was a special benevolent committee (comité de secours), which usually included the village priest, the schoolmaster, the burgomaster and three or four others of the prominent citizens of the commune. Through their intimate knowledge of the conditions in their locality, and of the resources of the various individuals, they were able, as a rule, to efficiently administer the relief funds entrusted to them. Each application for aid would be examined individually by the local committee. Usually no money was distributed, but the family would be given a credit for a definite sum each week at the warehouse or dépôt of the provisioning committee (comité d'alimentation). In this way alone was it possible to put the distribution of relief on a uniform basis and to apply the value of the gifts so as to accomplish the maximum of benefit.

Francqui's Report on the Relief Organisations.—In a letter written to Hoover on November 23 Francqui described the organisation that had been set up in Belgium. He pointed out the great degree of independence enjoyed by the sub-committees. 'Even in normal conditions it would have been very difficult to concentrate the whole work at Brussels and in the Comité National, which is not fully acquainted with local needs. Under the present conditions it would have been practically impossible, because of the lack of means of communication, to centralise the details of the whole work in Brussels. Therefore, in agreement with your American friends who have resided for some years in Belgium, we thought it useful to create these sub-committees in each province with practically independent control of local affairs, but under sufficient supervision from the Comité National to prevent abuses in distribution. By the side of and co-operating with the Comité National, there is the Brussels office of the Commission for Relief in Belgium under the direction of Messrs. Heinemann and Hulse, who act under instructions from Mr. Whitlock. This American committee controls with us the distribution among the various provinces of the foodstuffs brought to Rotterdam. They arrange the transportation within Belgium of foodstuffs received, only with enormous difficulties. . . . In brief, the Comité National has the mission of controlling the sub-committees, of providing them with food in accord with the C.R.B., of reporting immediately any requisitions to the Brussels office of the C.R.B., of centralising the correspondence and book-keeping and arranging for the regular payment by the sub-committees of the value of the goods they receive.'

The Distribution of Food. The details of the different systems of food distribution will be discussed fully in a later chapter. It is sufficient to note here that the systems varied widely in different provinces and localities. The Comité National established the maximum ration and fixed the maximum price at which the relief foods could be sold to the consumers by the communal committees. They determined also in a broad way the principles on which food should be distributed. It was provided, for example, that the food ration should be the same for everyone, for rich and poor alike, especially in the case of bread. Political and religious prejudices were not permitted to influence the distribution.

In the larger towns most of the food distributed gratuitously was given to the poor in the form of daily meals served from canteens. At the same time there were available the communal dépôts where food was sold to those who could afford to pay. Every family was registered on the books of the communes and its supplies were issued in accordance

with this register. After some experimenting in various methods of controlling distribution to prevent duplication and fraud, it was finally decided in all the provinces to issue 'cartes de menage' (household ration cards) which were of two sorts, the bread card and the card for sundry supplies distributed in the communal depôt. Each card bore upon it the name and address of the family and the number of rations. On this card were inscribed at the time of each weekly and fortnightly distribution the quantities actually issued to the family. The bread card had printed upon it a table of numbers from 1 to 90. The bread was distributed usually by the baker directly to the families, three or four times weekly, and the baker was required to cancel the number on the card corresponding to the distribution.

The Control of the Bakers.—In the various provinces different plans were devised for the bread distribution. In most cases the baker was allowed to receive the flour required to bake the bread for his clientèle and to sell his bread himself to the list of customers which he had turned in, at a price fixed by the committee. This question was one of the most difficult with which the relief organisations had to deal, as there was always a certain amount of fraud, which tended to greatly increase as time went on and flour became more and more scarce. In the Hainaut and in certain other places a rigid control was maintained by establishing communal depôts for bread distribution. The bakers baked for the commune and had to turn over to the communal depôts all the bread. Each baker's bread was kept separate in the depôt, and every family could obtain bread from their favourite baker. As the ration was definitely fixed by the provincial committee, and as the people had only somewhat less than half the bread they consumed in normal times, there was but little opportunity for the baker to deal fraudulently. He was required to deliver 132 to 135 kilos of bread for each 100 kilos of flour received.

The Milling Problem.—At first large quantities of white flour were received from America, but later on the Commission shipped wheat and the milling was done in Belgium. A number of the largest Belgian mills were practically taken over by the Commission on iron-clad contracts, which gave the Commission the exclusive use of the mill. As there was practically no other grain coming into the country, the Belgian mills could not operate unless they had a contract with the Commission. The Comité National and the Commission consequently could practically dictate the conditions of the contract and could have the milling done at a minimum cost. The chief mills used were those at Louvain and Brussels, although the provinces each had practically independent control of the milling of their own wheat. At first hundreds of the small mills, operated by wind or water-power, were used again, after an interval of many years of comparative idleness, to grind the wheat for the communes. In the Limbourg, for example, practically all the wheat was ground by these small mills for the whole of the first winter of the work. The flour from these small mills was necessarily whole-wheat flour. It was coarse and gritty, and ultimately the milling was done in the large mills located at central points. The Commission maintained a special milling department in order to control and inspect the mills, and to make sure that they were living up to their contracts. After some experimenting in the quality of flour, the Comité National and the Commission ultimately decided on an 82 per cent. flour. This means merely that for every 100 kilos of wheat, 82 kilos would be converted into flour, the remainder representing the bran. Flour of this percentage is a grey flour, and though perhaps not as palatable as the 60 per cent. flour, which is perfectly white, is unquestionably as nourishing as the white flour. There were, of course, local variations

in the way in which the flour, like the bread was handled, but in general the uniform system devised by the Comité National was followed.

'Secours' in Kind and in Money.—The charitable aspect of the relief work will be fully described later on. One should remember that the so-called ordinary charity (*secours ordinaire*) consisted solely of the free distribution of food and clothing; no money was issued to the ordinary poor. There were, however, special charitable funds which paid out money to those who were ordinarily dependent on men who had been killed at the war or were at the front. Later, a similar special fund was established to aid the unemployed and part of the unemployment benefit was paid in money. In addition to the maintenance of the soup canteens and the canteens for issuing food for babies, the committees accorded regular subsidies to committees organised to do a particular sort of relief work, such as the care of the blind, of the war orphans, of those mutilated in the war, to impoverished artists and the like. Regular subsidies were also allotted to hospitals, maternity clinics, schools and all the ordinary charitable institutions whose support in many cases had been cut off by the war.

By the time that the regular supply of food was assured, the machinery of distribution was in operation in Belgium. The Comité National and the provincial committees had made preliminary arrangements to deliver the food to every individual in Belgium who needed it. But because of the nature and magnitude of the work, it was obviously impossible that perfection should be achieved in a day, and in fact it was many months before the organisation was running smoothly and mechanically. The work necessarily involved constant change in the machinery of distribution, and, from the beginning to the end of its work, the relief organisation was constantly in the process of transformation and evolution.

### THE BRUSSELS OFFICE OF THE COMMISSION

The Heinemann Sub-Committee and the Brussels Office of the C.R.B.—It had been decided at the October conferences that Mr. Heinemann should be asked to become vice-chairman of the Commission and director of the Brussels office. The Americans in the Brussels committee were taken into the Commission. In Brussels, therefore, for some time but little apparent change took place in the work of Mr. Heinemann. He had been engaged for two months in gathering together food for Greater Brussels, and he went on now from the same offices with hardly more than a change in name. He was now director of the Commission for Relief in Belgium and not, as before, chairman of a sub-committee under Francqui's direction. Many of the chief men of the Comité National probably failed to realise the significance of this change in name. They continued to regard the Commission as a subordinate agent of the Comité National, just as Heinemann's food-supply sub-committee had previously been. They were consequently inclined at times to object to any interference on the part of the Commission in the control of food distribution. Heinemann himself probably did not realise to the full the importance attached by the allied governments to the direct control of the relief operations by the Commission. At any rate, this attitude of the Belgians in the Comité National who felt that the work, as a purely Belgian institution, should be carried on altogether by Belgians, was to lead to many complications and much difficulty later on.

It necessarily took some time to get the Brussels office into running order. In the month of November various efforts were made by the Rotterdam and London offices to speed up the organisation of the work inside Belgium. Until practically the end of December, however, the staff available in Belgium was so insufficient that it was impossible to provide for adequate representation of the Commission and for the organisation of the Brussels office. During this period, however, the American Minister and Hugh Gibson, the ever active secretary of the Brussels Legation, in co-operation with Heinemann and Hulse, were paving the way for the later organisation of the Brussels office.

**The Patron Ministers and the Commission.**—During the first weeks in November the Patron Ministers were rather uncertain as to what extent they should participate in the work. Their diplomatic positions made it necessary for them to act with great discretion, and yet they realised to the full the responsibilities which they had undertaken in associating themselves with the Commission. All the shipments from Rotterdam until September 1915 were consigned to the American Minister personally. It was therefore necessary for him to send a power of attorney to the man who represented the Commission at the various points in Belgium. Thus, in the early weeks of November the American Consuls at Antwerp, Ghent and Liège each received powers of attorney, and, as the American delegates of the Commission arrived in Belgium, they also were given power of attorney to act for the Minister in receiving the food shipments. The first few ships from Rotterdam were sent in under the personal escort of members of the American Legation at The Hague.

**Van Dyke's Position.**—Minister Van Dyke from the first took a great interest in the Commission's work and played an active part in helping it to begin its work. He was inclined to believe that the Patron Ministers should exercise extensive executive power over the Commission's work and, especially in the early days of November, he was very much concerned about the working out of the organisation in Belgium. Thus he wrote to Whitlock on November 1, that the food in Belgium should be stored under the supervision of officials of the American Government and under the protection of the American flag. 'I give this advice because our French and English friends do not believe that any large quantities of supplies would be secure in Belgian hands in the event of possible return of the German armies through Belgium. This may or may not be a natural misgiving, but at least we have to reckon with it, and it is our duty to give every guarantee in our power that our humane effort to revictual the civil population shall not be diverted to military purposes.'

**Captain Lucey's Attitude.**—Captain Lucey from the first was much concerned because of the failure of the Brussels office to organise their end of the work as quickly as he had done in Holland. On November 1 Curtis had made his first trip to Brussels as courier of the Commission, and thereafter he went in comparatively frequently with correspondence which he delivered at the American Legation. Whitlock turned over to Heinemann and to the Comité National all the correspondence relating to the detailed carrying out of the Commission's program. Whitlock, somewhat fearful lest Lucey should act independently in making shipments to Belgium, wrote on November 2 insisting that all shipments from Rotterdam should be made only on order from the committee at Brussels. Lucey, writing two days later, stated that he thoroughly agreed to this, and that his chief concern was to get in touch with the Brussels office in order to receive its instructions. 'This office is subject to your command. We are only going to ship food-

supplies on your order or on the order of those you may designate.' Captain Lucey was insistent from the first that the Commission should establish itself in Belgium quite independently of the Comité National and said that his office would take orders only from the Commission, not from the Comité National. He repeatedly urged that the Brussels office should be brought into such a state of organisation that it could co-operate effectively with him.

There seemed for a time to be a possibility that the American Legation would actively take over the direction of relief operations in Belgium. Van Dyke at least thought this the only way to control the work. Writing to Whitlock on November 6 he said: 'I am very much obliged to you for the copy of the letter which you wrote to Captain Lucey in regard to the distribution of foodstuffs in Belgium. You are absolutely right. The whole matter must be entirely under your control and nothing must be done without your authority. I have assumed the same position in regard to affairs here and shall use it in order to give effect to the instructions which you may issue.'

Whitlock and the Responsibility for the Relief Work.—The Minister, however, because of his diplomatic position, could not assume the full responsibility which would necessarily devolve upon the Brussels office of the Commission. The question of the degree of his responsibility arose at once when the first shipments arrived and when the financial side of the operations came to be considered. All foods were consigned to Whitlock personally and he had to exercise control over the distribution, but he could not, of course, accept the financial responsibility. The Société Générale and the Comité National, in a letter to Whitlock of November 7, agreed, however, that 'it goes without saying that your personal responsibility, as well as that of your Government, will not be involved if any part of the merchandise consigned to your name be lost.' Whitlock, in replying, said that he would be glad to assist the work by giving personal attention to the protection of shipments. 'My very earnest desire is to avoid any useless complications, so as to hasten the distribution of relief, and that is why I believe that the protective measures which you wish to see taken in your behalf may be more effectively arranged between yourselves and the Commission.' Whitlock apparently intended at this time that the food should be turned over entirely to the Comité National upon its arrival in Belgium, and that the whole work of distribution should be done by the Belgian committees. He seemed to believe that the Commission would limit itself to investigating reported violations of the German agreements. This seemed to have been also the idea of the Comité National, for, in writing Whitlock on November 9, Francois said: 'Consignments of food-supplies from abroad, intended for the provisionment of the Belgian civil population, have been shipped to you and will subsequently be consigned to your name. In order to protect you from all responsibility, both pecuniary and moral, and of any other possible sort, which may result from these operations, we wish to state to you that we assume the entire burden of the work.'

The Need for American Representatives in Belgium.—On the outside of Belgium, however, the men in the Commission were rapidly coming to see that the Commission would have to assume very great responsibilities in Belgium, and that it must have a well organised office in Brussels with sufficient power to control the relief operations. But, before any such office could be established, it was necessary to find the men to do the work. Shaler had returned to London from Brussels in the first days of November with a report as to conditions there. Jarvis Bell, who had accompanied Langhorne in escorting



the first shipment to Brussels, had discussed with the Minister and with Heinemann the nature of the organisation to be set up in Belgium. Heinemann and Hulse had been to Rotterdam to confer with Lucey, and Lucey had emphasised to them the importance which would attach to the Brussels office. There was at first a proposal that the American army officers, who had been sent to Europe to assist American travellers to return home, might be used as representatives of the Commission in Belgium, but this was, after some consideration, deemed inadvisable. About the middle of November, Hoover wired to Lucey suggesting that young men of university education and of some European experience, who could speak French or German, would be the best type for the Commission's work. Two men were sent in about November 20, when G. S. Jackson was assigned to Liège and Amos Johnson to Brussels. They were the first delegates, after Curtis, to go into Belgium. They set about assisting as best they could, but for a time could get but few definite instructions about their duties and responsibilities. Jackson immediately worked out a plan of his own for the Commission's work at Liège. Armed with the power of attorney of the Minister, and equipped with an automobile put at his disposal, he dashed up and down the canal and about the provinces of Liège and Limbourg, getting the first shipments safely delivered and distributed.

The Minister and Francqui ask for American Delegates.—By the end of November, as the organisation began to function and shipments from Rotterdam became more frequent, the urgent and immediate need for Americans to represent the Commission in Belgium was generally realised. The American Consuls at Ghent, Antwerp and Liège were asked to lend a hand, but were unable to give all their time to the work, and were not under direct control of the Commission. Heinemann and his committee recruited a few Americans resident in Brussels to assist them, but as the details of the work piled up it became evident that men must be sent in at once. Whitlock therefore wrote to Lucey on November 23 that 'it is highly important for the successful conduct of the work of the Brussels office that eight or ten intelligent young Americans, speaking French and, if possible, German, be sent here as soon as possible.' Francqui, in writing Hoover on the same date, expressed similarly the immediate need for Americans to carry on the work. He outlined the services to be undertaken by Heinemann as representative of the Commission in Brussels, but went on to say: 'The work of the Commission in Belgium cannot be absolutely efficient until it has at its disposal a sufficient number of delegates to attach at least one to each provincial committee. This delegate ought to be an American. Provided with authority by Mr. Whitlock, he would enjoy a certain immunity as regards the Germans, and would have sufficient influence not to be too much vexed in his labours. In addition to the protection which he would assure to the supplies in the province to which he would be assigned, he ought also, in the name of Mr. Whitlock, to negotiate with the German authorities the means of transport necessary to distribute the food sent from Rotterdam to the chief point of his province and to even the smallest commune in the province.'

Hoover Calls on Oxford Rhodes Scholars for Volunteers.—On receiving these messages, Hoover looked about to see where men possessing the necessary qualifications could be found. There was not time to get men from America. The choice was therefore practically limited to Americans who happened to be at the time in Europe and especially in England. While wondering where he could find the men, a happy suggestion came to him. The Rhodes scholarships had brought to Oxford University a body of

nearly a hundred young Americans. In a sense they were all picked men ; for a high standard of character, ability and intelligence is required for the holder of a Rhodes scholarship. There were also at Oxford a considerable number of other Americans, graduates of American Universities, who were carrying on research work of various kinds. The idea of calling for volunteers from this already picked body appealed to Mr. Hoover. He had faith in young Americans and especially in American college men. He had had some of the Oxford men on his staff in his American relief work. He immediately got in touch with two of them, Perrin Galpin and E. F. Hollmann. They discussed the suggestion with some of their friends at Oxford and found that all were enthusiastic at the prospect of having the opportunity of sharing in the work of the Commission in Belgium. Life at Oxford in war-time, when practically all other able-bodied men had joined the forces, was not altogether attractive to energetic young Americans. At a meeting of the American Club on November 27 over forty men offered their services to the Commission.

The First Delegates in Belgium.—Ten were immediately chosen to go to Belgium and left London on December 3, after having been most thoroughly lectured upon the difficulties and responsibility of the work they were about to assume. 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 amidst all sorts of dangers and difficulties. The first and most important of their duties was to be neutral. They were told that the whole success of the undertaking might be endangered by a single careless word or act, and that the Commission could assume no responsibility for their personal safety. They were followed a week later by a second party of men, and before Christmas more than twenty-five Oxford students were at work in Belgium. Their experience there was, of course, very different from what they had been led to expect. Instead of leading a life of hardship, they had luxuries thrust upon them, chateaux in which to live, automobiles in which to ride, and well-appointed offices in which to work. They found their duties to be more those of diplomats than of first-aid relief workers in a devastated land. The story of their experiences and of the way they went about their work, of their success in a very difficult task, and of the warm friendship and admiration they won among the Belgians will be told elsewhere. It is sufficient to say here that they made good and that their devoted and energetic service accomplished perhaps not the impossible, but at least the improbable. Captain Lucey, and the various later directors of the Commission, highly commended their ability, adaptability and unselfish devotion to their chief and to the Commission. The majority of these first men, who had gone to Belgium for six weeks, actually remained six months, while some of them served a year or even two years in Belgium. Many, after having returned to England, went back for a new period of service. They possessed the youthful energy, the undaunted determination, the willingness to work, the organising ability needed for bringing order out of chaos in Belgium. They had also the adaptability and the tact that made it possible for them, after the work of organisation was accomplished, to become a sort of unofficial diplomatic corps representing the interests of the Commission effectively and well, and earning at the same time the affection and admiration of the Belgians and the respect and confidence of the Germans with whom they had to deal.

Hoover's First Visit to Brussels.—In order to see for himself the exact conditions in Belgium and to hasten the organisation of the Brussels office, Hoover decided at the end of November to visit Brussels. Accompanied by Messrs. Rose and Bicknell, the

representatives of the Rockefeller Foundation, he and Mr. Shaler went first to Rotterdam and later to Brussels to inspect the relief work. They were the guests of honour at a meeting of the Comité National held on December 1. Solvay, speaking for the Comité, expressed the gratitude of Belgium for the work which the Ministers and the American members of the Commission had done in making it possible to avert famine from Belgium.

The Comité National Expresses its Gratitude to Hoover.—‘We shall never forget,’ he said, ‘the emotion which seized us when at the beginning of our activities it was made known to us that the Ministers of Spain and the United States were willing to patronise our work and make it theirs. This emotion we experienced still more on the return from London of our colleagues, Messrs. the Baron Lambert and Francqui; the latter not concealing his lively satisfaction said to us: “We have the good fortune to have at the head of the Commission in London a man of action in every sense of that term, Mr. Hoover. Thanks to him, I am convinced that our affairs will go well.” And that affirmation of Mr. Francqui has now become an acknowledged fact, a reality which relieves us from poignant cares. This same emotion is renewed to-day in seeing in our midst Mr. Hoover and the members of the Rockefeller Foundation.’

Solvay, in continuing his address, gave voice to the universal satisfaction in Belgium that the Americans had come to the aid of the civil population. ‘This is a noble act, gentlemen! You are part of a people who are as practical as you are generous. You have shaped and cherished a pure and high conception of humanity which must react against the pressure of our time and which will create before long an active universal conscience that will make it possible for righteous sufferers to hope and believe in the right. From the bottom of our hearts we thank you for your indispensable support in our work, and we assure you in advance of the historic gratitude of a country which knows its duty.’

At the same meeting Francqui rendered homage to Hoover: ‘A man of great heart and a man of great activity also, who has succeeded in the course of a few weeks in assuring to Belgium three months’ food-supplies. Thanks to his tireless devotion we can face the future without excessive anxiety.’

Hoover, in replying, referred to the great difficulties which had to be overcome and warned the Belgian committee that the situation would continue to be critical for some time, because of the length of time required to transport supplies from America. After the first of the year, however, he believed they could obtain a minimum of 50 to 60,000 tons of food monthly. He said, also, that the appeal addressed to the American people in behalf of the population in Belgium was obtaining an unprecedented success.

The Investigations of the Rockefeller Foundation.—The representatives of the Rockefeller Foundation spent the greater part of December in Belgium, making a thorough investigation of the conditions and drawing up a report on the relief work with a recommendation that the Foundation should continue to make a monthly donation of 10,000 tons of wheat. They visited nearly every part of Belgium, as well as the French towns near the frontier, and were given every facility to study the real conditions.

Hoover perceives the need of Strengthening the Brussels Office.—Hoover remained only a few days, but even in this short visit was able to grasp the problems of distribution, and was more impressed than ever of the need for the immediate extension of the Commission’s services in Belgium. He had conferences with Whitlock, Heinemann and Francqui to consider the functions to be exercised by the Commission in Brussels and throughout Belgium. No effective office service had yet been organised and Hoover urged

that this should be created as quickly as possible. One of the results of Hoover's visit was a decision of Whitlock that it might be necessary for him to take over personally the immediate control of matters of transportation and distribution on behalf of the Commission. He therefore asked Lucey to have all mail relating to the relief work sent to him and to address all telegrams to him. He believed that only in this way could the Commission obtain proper recognition for its work in Belgium. The work, however, soon developed into too great a burden to be carried by Whitlock and his staff, and before the end of the month it became necessary to set up an independent office of the Commission in Brussels.

The Brussels Office in December, 1914.—Several Americans living in Brussels were recruited for the service of the Commission. Mr. F. W. Meert was made delegate of the Commission for the province of Brabant and went energetically to work in co-operation with the Belgian committee to complete the provincial organisation. Two other American residents of Brussels, Messrs. Fleming and Bergson, were attached to the office of Mr. Heinemann to assist in Greater Brussels.

At this time practically the whole burden of the office work in the Brussels office at 48 Rue de Naples fell upon Mr. Macloskie and Amos Johnson. Heinemann and Hulse were too busily occupied in conferences and meetings with the German and Belgian authorities or with their private affairs to give much time to the details of the Commission organisation. The volume of correspondence coming into the Brussels office began to increase rapidly and to overwhelm Messrs. Macloskie and Johnson. All bills of lading for the rapidly increasing number of shipments came to them from Rotterdam, and on them rested the responsibility of seeing that each cargo reached its destination safely and was delivered to the proper committee.

Fernand Baetens, sole Belgian Member of the C.R.B.—Fortunately at this moment the Brussels office was able to enlist the services of a Belgian who was to become indispensable to the Commission work in Belgium, and who was to render invaluable services because of his ability, his local knowledge and his American-like directness and efficiency. This was M. Fernand Baetens, a Belgian of independent fortune and large experience in banking and shipping matters. Since the beginning of the war he had been comparatively unoccupied, and when the news came of the organisation of the Commission he went to the offices at 48 Rue de Naples and volunteered his services. For the first few days he was nothing more than a sort of office boy, but merit will always win recognition in times of crisis, and with characteristic energy he set to work to bring order out of chaos in the shipping arrangements. After a few days he was made the head of the shipping department of the Commission, a position which he continued to hold even after the withdrawal of the Americans from Belgium in April, 1917. He was the only Belgian ever to become formally a member of the American Commission, which jealously maintained its character as a neutral body. When the Americans left Belgium in consequence of the entry of the United States into the war, Baetens, with a young Dane, René Jensen, who had also served the Commission practically from the beginning, were the only members of the Commission left in Brussels. Baetens then became the representative of the Commission in Belgium in the new arrangement made to continue the provisionment of Belgium and Northern France.

The Delegates and Neutrality.—In those first days everything was in a very chaotic condition. It was naturally impossible to create a smoothly working organisation to handle so tremendous a task in the short space of a few weeks. When the first batch

of Rhodes scholars arrived at Brussels on December 7, 1914, no one in the Brussels office seemed to know what they were to do, save that they were to represent the Commission in some manner in the provinces. The only emphatic instructions which they received were that they were to be punctiliously neutral in every word and deed and were to avoid any sort of friction with the German authorities. This had been intimated to them at London, repeated emphatically and eloquently at Rotterdam by Captain Lucey, and reiterated tearfully but sternly in Brussels by Jarvis Bell. They spent several days, or even weeks, alternating between the Palace Hotel and the Rue de Naples before they were all assigned to their posts and given their instructions. The following were about the only definite instructions given to them: 'In your daily service remember that you have not only a service to render to these people, but that you have a duty to this Commission and above all you have a duty to your own country. You must forget that the greatest war in history is being waged; you have no interest in it other than the feeding of the Belgian people. You must school yourself to a realisation that you have to us and to your country a sacred obligation of absolute neutrality in every word and deed. Remember that when this war is over, the thing that will stand out will not be the number of dead and wounded, but the record of those efforts that went to save life.'

The Delegates at Work in the Provinces.—This was all very impressive, but gave very little indication to these first delegates of what their task was actually to be. They had come into Belgium keyed up with heroic resolve to devote their whole energy and ability to the work. No one in London, Rotterdam or Brussels could tell them exactly what that work was to be, so out into the provinces they went and there found work a plenty. In those first days they seldom stopped to enquire what their specific duties were. The food was to be distributed to every household in Belgium, and an infinite amount of detailed organisation had to be accomplished before this end could be attained. The delegates almost to a man threw themselves into the breach and did what was to be done without enquiring what their authority was, or whether they were expected to attack the problems to which they devoted themselves. There was indeed much to be done: ships to be helped through damaged canals; sunken bridges and barges to be lifted out; lightermen to be cajoled or intimidated into obeying orders; warehouses and depôts to be installed, filled and protected; communication within the provinces and with Brussels to be established; mills to be controlled; bakers to be constrained into living up to their contracts; systems of distribution, administrative forms, ration cards to be devised and put into effect; local committees to be organised and induced to distribute food according to instructions; complaints to be investigated and difficulties with the Germans to be smoothed out. The task was a formidable one. One of the best tributes to the efficiency with which these young Americans rose to the issue is the fact that food-supplies were being distributed in every province and in almost every village within six weeks of the time of their arrival on the scene. In all their work at first they had little but moral backing on which to depend, but they were young, fearless, energetic and American, and their initiative inspired confidence in the committees which at first had looked askance at their youth. They commandeered automobiles from the Belgians who were only too willing to offer them. They extracted passports and motor-fuel from the German authorities. They personally patrolled the canals and on occasions even lent a hand to remove debris and clear up channels for the lighters. They personally supervised the early distributions and made sure that the food was sent to the places of ultimate distribution with as much speed

as possible. In all this they had but few instructions from the Brussels office. Jackson in Liège depended almost altogether on Captain Lucey for instructions, and Kittredge, the delegate for Limbourg, went directly to his province from Rotterdam and was there at work two weeks before he even visited Brussels. Mr. Edward Eyre Hunt, who had been in Antwerp since the time of the bombardment, was asked to become the Commission's delegate in Antwerp and he, with the aid of the Antwerp committee, practically worked out his entire distribution system without a word of advice or instruction from Brussels. Mr. Robinson Smith working at Mons, in the Hainaut, in the face of alarming food shortages, was yet able, on his own initiative, to get the Commission's food quickly and effectively distributed in time to prevent any real famine, but he too had little help from Brussels. Glenn and Bowden at Namur, and Wellington and Hawkins in the Luxembourg, spent all their time travelling over their provinces organising committees, repairing canals, and getting things under way, on their own initiative. At this time the people at the Brussels office were absorbed in completing the general outline of the Commission's distribution system, and had but little understanding of the conditions in the provinces and but little appreciation of the problems by which the delegates were faced.

Francqui had prophesied more truly than he had realised when on December 8 he wrote to Hoover: 'When the plan you conceived is carried out, I think the organisation of your offices and ours will be complete. As a matter of fact, I am more and more convinced that as soon as the Brussels office of the C.R.B. has from twenty to twenty-five Americans at its disposal, so as to be able to send two to each province, everything will go without a hitch.' There were to be indeed many hitches, but things went on in spite of them. As Francqui wrote on December 12: 'The young Americans already at work are doing splendidly. Liège is to be congratulated more and more on the presence of Mr. Jackson; the same applies to Mr. Meert and Mr. Johnson, who are of great service to the committees to which they are attached.'

**Lack of Unity in the Early Efforts.**—As a result of the situation growing out of the lack of definite instructions from Brussels, the efforts in the different provinces lacked unity in policy. The various provincial committees and American delegates had varying ideas as to how food should be distributed, and each province developed an organisation different in some respect from every other. It soon became apparent that a greater unity in the general organisation must be effected. It was all very well to allow the provincial committees independent action, but the general principles must be the same everywhere. At the meeting of the executive committee held on December 22, the lack of unity was ascribed to the lack of permanent contact between the Brussels offices and the provinces. The activities of the American delegates seemed to have exceeded the anticipations of the Belgian gentlemen of the executive committee, for they seemed to have been somewhat alarmed at the part being played by the American delegate. The committee decided that it was necessary 'that there should be at Brussels a chief of the American delegates to the provinces, who will be perfectly cognisant of the situation and of the general scheme of organisation. This chief of delegates should attend the meetings of the different committees and take part in the deliberations between the executive committee of the C.N. and the Commission, concerning the execution of the measures decided upon. He would be charged with co-ordinating the efforts of the delegates and of explaining to them the instructions given to the provincial committees. He should have under his orders two or three inspectors who would assist him in his duties and go about the provinces controlling

the activities of the American delegates and keeping them up to the mark (*contrôler l'activité des délégués américains, les tenir en haleine*). This chief of delegates, who should know perfectly French, English and, if possible, other languages, would also have it as his task to receive foreign benefactors of distinction, to accompany them and to explain to them the mechanism of the organisation. This service ought to be installed without delay. A man should be found who is capable of performing this mission.'

A preliminary organisation was planned in the Brussels office about the middle of December. Heinemann, as vice-chairman of the Commission, was to be the director of and was to be assisted by Mr. Hulse as honorary secretary. Macloskie was to be the executive secretary, Baetens was to be in charge of shipping matters, P. C. Galpin, who had come over with the second party of Rhodes scholars, was made supervisor of American delegates. It was proposed that Meert should be made chief inspector to go about the provinces, unify the various organisations and restrain the American delegates. One American was assigned to each province as head delegate with one or more delegates to assist him, the number depending upon the importance of the province.

The activities of the C.R.B. in Belgium were outlined in a set of instructions to delegates, drawn up toward the end of December. These instructions are published in the Commission report and their chief points are enumerated below.

'The General Scheme of Organisation in Belgium.'—In this 'General scheme of organisation in Belgium' it was provided that the Commission's central office would be in Brussels; that there should be delegates assigned to each province to direct branch offices in co-operation with the delegates of the C.N. and of the provincial committees.

'The business of the delegate of the C.R.B. is to attend to the reception of all merchandise shipped by the C.R.B. to his district; to control same and to transfer same to the comité provincial under the conditions and in the manner to be specified.'

As all food was under the protection of the Ministers, it was held essential that the merchandise should remain the property of the C.R.B. until distributed to the communes. All the actual work of handling the shipments within the provinces should, however, be left to the provincial committee, who should give to the delegate of the Commission receipts for all shipments. The provincial committee was to bear all expenses for transportation, milling, insurance, storage and personnel. Although the food was thus actually in the power of the provincial committee from the moment it arrived in the province, it remained in principle the property of the Commission until delivered to the communes. All orders for delivery from regional warehouses should state that the food was the property of the Commission and no delivery order was to be valid without the endorsement of the American delegate. All milling and transportation matters were to be arranged by the central office of the Commission and the C.N. at Brussels in agreement with the delegate of the C.R.B. and the head of the provincial committee for the province concerned. The delegate was required to send weekly reports as to shipments received, the difficulties encountered and especially as to the effectiveness of the operations of the Belgian committees. Protective placards issued by the Germans were to be under the control of the American delegate. No placard could be issued without his consent. Definite instructions were also given as to the manner in which reports should be made to Brussels.

Powers of the American Delegates.—These instructions gave to the delegates great power of discretion as to the extent to which they should actually intervene in the control of the operations of the provincial committees. The natural result was that the

power, influence and duties of the provincial delegates differed according to the efficiency of the provincial committees, the difficulties of the local situation and the personality of the delegate. In Antwerp and the Hainaut, particularly, the early delegates, E. E. Hunt and Robinson Smith, believed that the work should be as far as possible actually directed by the American delegate. They attended themselves to many of the complicated details of administration, that in other provinces were from the first left to the Belgian committees. Such questions as the selection of mills, the repartition of the shipments among the various regions and choice of methods of distribution were to a great extent decided by them, whereas elsewhere the provincial committee took the initiative and arranged these matters themselves with the friendly co-operation of the American delegate, but without his direct action.

Differences of Opinion on the Functions of the C.R.B.—In the very first weeks of the Commission's work there developed a difference of opinion among the delegates themselves as to their functions and duties, which was to continue until the final withdrawal of the Americans from Belgium. Hardly a meeting passed but that the two opposing views came to light. On the one hand was the group led in the beginning by Hunt and Robinson Smith, that believed that the work of relief should be essentially an American affair; that the responsibility for the direction of relief operations rested on the American members of the Commission; that its methods should be those of American business efficiency; and that consequently the head delegate in each province was to be regarded as the manager of relief operations in his province. Opposed to this view were the majority of provincial delegates and all of the successive directors of the Commission in Brussels. They agreed that the work of the Commission was indispensable to the success of the relief operations, and that the American delegates should exercise such supervision and control as to make sure that the food-supplies and benevolent funds were efficiently handled, that they were fairly distributed and that they went solely to the Belgian civil population. But, according to this second point of view, the actual work of distribution was essentially a Belgian domestic problem; the work could be best done by Belgians who, because of their acquaintance with local conditions, habits and ideas, were in a position to conduct the work in a manner agreeable to the Belgians themselves. It was not the duty nor the function of the Americans to reform the Belgians or revolutionise their business methods and their social habits. The Belgian committees were composed in most cases of the ablest men of all callings and professions and of all political and religious groups. The Commission could not even think of bringing in a sufficient staff of Americans to direct the whole work in its own way; consequently, according to this view, the delegate should use his power with extreme discretion, should act as a diplomatic intermediary between the Germans and the Belgians and between the various conflicting groups of Belgians, and should limit his control to that of general inspection of the work done by the Belgian committees. These two views were stoutly championed for two and a half years by delegates of differing personalities and opinions. In the end, as in the beginning, no definite decision was ever reached as to the exact function of the delegate, or the representative as he became later to be called. His position continued to depend largely upon his personality and upon that of the heads of the province to which he was assigned.

The instructions to delegates given above were approved by the executive committee of the Comité National. In these instructions it was stated that the Comité National working through an executive committee under Francqui's presidency had a double object: first, to



assist the C.R.B. in supplying the food necessary for the Belgian population, and second, to divide between the provincial committees the money obtained by subscriptions and by gifts and the goods and merchandise imported into Belgium by the Commission.

Chaos in the Rue de Naples. During the month of December the Commission offices in Belgium were gradually coming into working order; but chaos still reigned in the Rue de Naples. The provincial delegates, coming in after strenuous days spent in touring about their provinces in motor-cars, found little tangible assistance at Brussels. Robinson Smith, in a sketch written later, referred especially to this period, when he described the C.R.B. in Belgium as 'an organisation without any.'

The Brussels office was overwhelmed with the details of its complicated task. It had little knowledge of the conditions in the various provinces and had but a vague idea of how the Commission's control over distribution should be exercised. The provincial delegates, after trying vainly to get advice or assistance to aid them to solve their own problems, usually left Brussels in despair and went ahead on their own initiative to work out plans of distribution in co-operation with the provincial committees. The delegates on going to Brussels would often wait for hours in the corridors of the office, without being able to find anyone who was at all concerned about their difficulties. Every time they would ask for advice, the almost invariable answer would be: 'We will go into the matter; won't you call in to-morrow?' The exasperated delegate would walk out with his problems unsolved and return to his province to win his own battles as best he could. The C.R.B. in Brussels was indeed in swaddling clothes, as Stockton once put it, in writing a sketch of those first chaotic days.

**Hoover comes to Brussels to Reorganise the Office.**—At the end of December, however, a decided change came over the Brussels office. Hoover came back to Belgium on another of his hurried visits. Everywhere in demand, his hands and head full of the tremendous difficulties and the problems of his task, he spent most of his time in those early months going back and forth between London, Brussels and Berlin. Everywhere that he went he found anxious problems to be solved, involved situations to be disentangled, seemingly irresistible obstacles to be overcome, but almost invariably in a very few days he was able to find a ready and satisfactory solution. He was quick to see the main points of any problem, and had an intuitive perception of where and how he could best exert his influence and pressure. So it was now. He went thoroughly over the situation in Brussels in conferences with Whitlock and Franqui, and resolved to reorganise the Brussels office and to get it thoroughly in touch with the Commission offices outside Belgium. At his request, Captain Lucey went to Brussels immediately afterwards as director of the Brussels office.

**The Coming of Captain Lucey and of Order.**—By the intervention of Franqui a new office was secured in the three upper floors of the handsome building of the Banque Belge pour l'Etranger at 66 Rue des Colonies. A member of the executive committee of the Comité National, the Chevalier de Wouters d'Oplinter, was delegated to work with the director of the Commission and to serve as intermediary with the Comité National. Captain Lucey and the Chevalier de Wouters, sitting at their desks facing one another in the director's room, dealt promptly and effectively with the situation, and within a few short weeks the Brussels office was in smooth running order. Closer co-operation was established and thereafter maintained between the Commission and the Belgian committees. The first delegates who had come to Belgium had been advised to establish offices apart

from the provincial committees and to work independently, as far as possible. The impracticability of any such division in the relief operations was now realised, and the various American delegates and provincial committees were instructed to work in close co-operation, to avoid duplication of efforts and of records, and to remain in constant contact with one another. As a matter of fact such co-operation had already been established in practically all provinces. The American delegate's office was already practically without exception in the same building as those of the provincial committees. The intimate collaboration between the American delegates and Belgian committees was maintained until the end of the work, and relations between the delegates in the provinces and their committees were almost always of the most harmonious and cordial character.

**The Reorganisation of the Brussels Office.**—At the same time the Brussels office, on moving into the new quarters, was thoroughly reorganised. Five departments were established in order to systematically define the work. These were, the Executive Department, under the director; the Shipping Department, under Mr. Baetens; the Secretariat, under P. C. Galpin as secretary; and the Accounts and Statistical Departments. A regular automobile courier service was established thrice weekly to Rotterdam and once or twice weekly to each of the provinces. Later on, the delegates themselves carried their mail to and fro from the province, but at first the Commission maintained a special courier to carry the mails inside Belgium. Arrangements were made with the German authorities for permission to carry the mails and for the speedy transmission of important messages by telegraph inside Belgium and to Rotterdam. A bi-weekly meeting of all American delegates in Brussels was decided on.

**The First Meeting of American Delegates.**—The first of these meetings was held on January 13. Here the delegates met Captain Lucey and his successor in the Rotterdam office, Mr. C. A. Young, and were given definite instructions about their duties and about the reports which they were to send to Brussels. In informal discussion special problems were taken up and the experiences of various delegates were called upon. Such questions as damages to ships *en route*, control of mills and bakeries, and issuance of flour to patisseries or pastry shops were discussed for the first time in general meeting as inconclusively as they were discussed in nearly every other meeting. Mr. Meert explained the system of ration cards (*cartes de menage*) that had been put into effect in the province of Brabant, and expressed his opinion that such a system should be adopted throughout Belgium. Mr. Young gave a full description of the work of the Rotterdam office, and of the shipping arrangements perfected by that office. He told the delegates exactly what they expected to do in handling the shipping inside Belgium. As usual, the question of the extent of the delegates' authority was brought up and, also as usual, discussed without result. Captain Lucey tried to settle the matter by assuring the delegates that 'they had physical control over all supplies until they were delivered to the central warehouse of the province, and moral control and practical supervision after that. If a delegate was satisfied with the way in which the distribution was effected, he should make a report to the Brussels office, which would take the matter up with the Comité National. He was not himself to give orders to the provincial committee in matters of detail.' As a matter of fact this was as far as the question was ever resolved.

**Solvay Address at Heinemann's Luncheon.**—The following day, January 14, the final organisation of the Brussels office was celebrated by a luncheon given by Mr. Heinemann to the Ministers, Captain Lucey, the American delegates and the members

of the Comité Exécutif of the Comité National. Solvay, in addressing the group, expressed once more his thanks and those of Belgium for the work which the Commission was doing. He emphasised the difficulties that had attended the first days of the work and asked the indulgence of the Americans for the imperfection of the existing organisation. 'The work is imperfect still, but it is certain it could not be otherwise. It had to be created in haste and without regard to precision in detail. It had hardly begun to direct the still uncomplete work in Greater Brussels when it became necessary to extend its activities to the entire country.'

He was sure, he said, that Captain Lucey, who had so splendidly organised the Rotterdam office, would recognise the difficulties encountered by the Belgians and would appreciate at its just value the part played by Belgian men of action. Solvay was sure that the Commission and the Comité National in co-operation would soon perfect the whole work of distribution of relief-supplies within Belgium.

And in the months to come, in spite of recurring difficulties, in spite of occasional differences of opinions, in spite of submarine blockades and diplomatic obstacles of the most obstinate character, the work of relief in Belgium went on and the Belgian people were fed.

The dual organisation created in the final month of 1914 was to be in a continual process of change and of evolution, its tasks, its burdens and obligations were to continually increase, but the clear object of the common effort was never lost from sight.

Whitlock to Hoover. Hoover's success in bringing order out of chaos in the Brussels office had been as great as most of his similar achievements were. Whitlock, writing to Hoover on January 13, 1915, after Captain Lucey had been in charge in Brussels for two weeks, said: 'I cannot resist the impulse to write and thank you, first for the splendid work you did during your last visit here, the results of which have ever since been so marked in our work. It has all gone on smoothly, and I have to thank you for the hours of quiet and days of peace that have resulted from your labours. May the gods reward you!

'And then I wish to thank you for sending Captain Lucey here. He is a remarkable man. He directs the whole organisation now with the ease that a corporal manoeuvres his squad, though the comparison is not at all favourable to him since he is a sort of field-marshal. I have grown to have, not only an unbounded admiration, but a sincere affection for him. He is pure gold all the way through, and the day God made him he must have been in a good mood and have had plenty of material at hand.

'I am sorry you were not here on New Year's Day, for something very beautiful occurred. Spontaneously, quietly, all day long a stream of Belgians poured into the Legation signing names in a little book which Baron Lambert provided; over three thousand in all, to express their thanks for what America has done—all sorts and conditions of men, from noblemen whose cards wore high titles down to the poorest woman from the slums who had carefully written her name on a bit of pasteboard, the edge of which still showed the traces of the scissors. It was very touching, very moving, and I want you to know of it, for you have done so much more than any of us to help them. Nobody need tell me any more that self-interest is the great power that moves man, or that there is no gratitude in the world. Surely in this wonderful work this best of human qualities has brilliantly shown forth.'

## CHAPTER V

NEGOTIATIONS FOR GUARANTEES AND SUBSIDIES,  
DECEMBER 1914 TO APRIL 1915

## THE NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF GUARANTEES

Diplomatic Negotiations.—During the time that the machinery of the Commission's organisation was being set in motion, Mr. Hoover and his associates were carrying on diplomatic negotiations, with the assistance of the Patron Ministers of the Commission in Berlin, London, Paris and Le Havre, to establish a permanent working basis for the Commission. By December 1 the Germans had agreed not to requisition imported foods, to temporarily suspend the requisition of native cereals and to grant the Commission liberty of action within Belgium. They had signified their willingness to reserve all products of the Belgian soil for the use of the Belgian civil population if the allied governments would permit the importation of food to continue and would aid the Commission in financing the purchases.\* They had also approved the plan of exchange by which the money of the Belgian Government could be obtained by the Commission in London from the Belgian Government in consideration of the payment of obligations of the Belgian Government inside Belgium by the Comité National. The allied governments on their part had permitted the importation of food into Belgium to begin; while the Belgian Government had advanced large sums of money to the Commission and the British Government had granted an initial subsidy of £100,000.

The Question of the Responsibility for Belgium's Condition.—Once the Commission had begun its work, however, there developed an international quarrel as to who was in reality responsible for the situation of Belgium. The Allies naturally asserted that it was Germany's duty to feed the country and that therefore the allied governments would be justified in refusing to permit the Commission for Relief in Belgium to continue its activities. The Germans, on the other hand, contended that the Belgians had always imported a great percentage of their food; that if it were not for the allied blockade the Belgians could buy the usual quantities of food in the usual markets of the world and bring them directly to Antwerp; consequently the Germans held that any shortage of food in Belgium was the result, not of their occupation, but of the blockade. For a time it seemed that the work of the Commission would be gravely endangered by this quarrel.

This situation illustrates very well the chief motif for the existence of the Commission, its *raison d'être*. Even many well-informed people have never realised this diplomatic situation which made the Commission the only possible means for the feeding of Belgium. Many Americans have often asked why a commission composed chiefly of Americans should be required to introduce food into Belgium, and have objected that this was a matter in which Americans should not have been called on to intervene. This objection has often been coupled with the mistaken idea that all the funds of the

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\* Letter of von der Goltz to Whitlock, November 14, 1914.

Commission were derived from gifts chiefly American in origin. Critics of the Commission have therefore contended that America was being asked to assume an obligation that should have fallen upon one or another of the belligerent groups.

As a matter of fact, without the intervention of the Commission for Relief in Belgium, any extensive 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. In order to show more clearly why this was so, one must take into consideration the views expressed at the time in England and in Germany about the Belgian relief problem. Mr. Hoover, on January 23, 1915, in a letter to the Hon. David Lloyd George, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, set forth in the clearest way the various attitudes taken in England and in Germany toward the question of relief and of the responsibility for the fate of the Belgians.

**The German Position.**—He pointed out that in Germany the dominant view was that in any case Germany was not legally or morally responsible for the feeding of the population of the occupied territory, but that on the contrary the German army was entitled to take the supplies necessary for its support from the occupied country. The majority of Germans also contended that, as Belgium had always imported two-thirds of her cereals and still possessed resources in credit sufficient to enable her to continue her purchases, the food shortage in Belgium must be attributed to the blockade. 'Nothing prevents the normal flow of trade and at least a partial revival of industry in Belgium except for the blockade by the British Navy, and therefore the moral responsibility for starvation of this population rests with the Allies.'

According to Hoover the Germans also held: 'That the people of Belgium by their hostility have seriously discomfited the German plans. Their continued hostility requires a considerable force of occupation. The Belgians refuse to perform the public services, and this compels the Germans to carry on these services with soldiers. In all these passive acts the civil population is still assisting the Allies, and, as the Allies have the benefit therefrom, they are morally obliged to open the gates of trade to the civil population. Furthermore, while the German food-supply is adequate to carry this war to a successful conclusion, if the German people have to take upon their backs the additional load of feeding seven million Belgians and three million French, their stores may be seriously jeopardised. It is the duty of the German Government to feed their own people first, and as the German national integrity is at stake, they do not propose to jeopardise it in any manner.'

This attitude of the Germans toward Belgium was clearly set forth in a dispatch from the semi-official Wolff Telegraph Agency, sent out from Berlin on November 25, 1914. Frederick Palmer, who was travelling in Germany about this same time, declared that Germany would not under any conditions send food to Belgium. 'Germans can think of Belgium only with angry bitterness: not humanity, but do-or-die patriotism governs their emotions. They blame the Belgians for spoiling their plan of campaign. Nothing is too bad for the Belgians. "Let the Belgians take care of themselves" is a feeling of public German opinion.'

**Opposition in England to the Commission's Work.**—'On the other hand,' said Mr. Hoover in this same letter to Lloyd George, 'there is a strong party in England which bitterly opposes the plan of permitting food to go into Belgium, even under the protection of the Commission and the neutral Ministers.' This party contended 'that it is the duty of the occupying army to provision the civil population: that by allowing the importation

of foodstuffs into Belgium, the Germans are being relieved of their moral and legal responsibility and in effect the German army is being supplied with foodstuffs by thus relaxing the demands which otherwise would be falling on their own stores. Moreover, it will be necessary for the occupying Power to increase its garrisons in the face of a starving population, in order to put down riots, and the enemy's forces would be occupied otherwise than in the fighting line ; that in general the situation is akin to a siege where succour to the civil population relieves the moral and physical strain upon the garrison ; that the ending of this war will be by economic pressure and any relaxation of this pressure assists the enemy.'

Hoover's own position, as he explained it to Lloyd George, was that ' as an American engaged in a work which imposes upon me the expression of no opinion as to the rights or wrongs of these views I can probably offer one comment.

Hoover's Position.—' It is now nearly three months since the discussion began as to which side had the responsibility for feeding these people. My colleagues and myself were satisfied at the beginning that the fixity of view and the belief in the righteousness of these respective arguments on both sides were such that the Belgians would starve before any settlement as to responsibility could be reached, unless a third party intervened. During the three months now elapsed since we first heard these views enunciated, I have seen no tendency for either side to become other than more positive in their belief, and, were it not for the stream of food which now filters in for the civil population in Belgium, the decimation of these people would already have begun. I may say that if my country can, in the midst of this conflict, demonstrate that neutrality need not be a mere barren negation, it will have contributed something to the amelioration of effects of this struggle.'

The Attitude of English Supporters of the C.R.E.—In concluding his letter, Hoover went on to discuss the attitude of those liberal-minded people in England who had from the first been staunch supporters of the Commission. ' These English people believe that the war was undertaken at the cost of the greatest sacrifices that their people have ever made, in order to accomplish for the world two 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 ; that in making these sacrifices to aid the Belgian people and maintain their national integrity, 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 a lengthening of this conflict by only a few days ; that the war will be won, not by compelling the Germans to give up six per cent. of their foodstuffs to the Belgians, but by pressure on the other ninety-four per cent. According to this point of view also the Belgians were entitled, by their heroic conduct, to support from the Allies ; they are keeping a considerable number of Germans off the fighting line ; they are incommoding the Germans by their passive resistance and by refusing to work in their arsenals and in their machine shops. Assuming that the Germans should in the last resort change their minds and feed the desperate and starving population, they certainly would do so only on receiving in return the services of this population and this would add an increase to their own military effectiveness, greater than the increase due to the loss of their own foodstuffs. Nothing can alter the fact that these people, the allies of Britain, who by their

gallant resistance have probably saved the cause, will starve or be slaughtered in thousands unless we give this support, and no plea based on military exigency can divest us of responsibility in such a tragedy. By the magnanimity of our own supports we will have added a further crown to the services which we shall have performed for humanity in undertaking this frightful struggle.'

**The Commission's part in the Relief of Belgium.**—These are as clear statements of the positions taken by the various belligerent peoples as can be made. They suffice to show how desperate the situation in Belgium would have been had not the Commission succeeded in finding a *modus vivendi* on which both groups of warring powers could agree. The Germans were willing to permit food to enter Belgium and to concede to the Commission the right to inspect and control the distribution of this food, a concession that was odious and irksome to the German military authorities. No German officer ever enjoyed the sight of Americans riding about Belgium in automobiles on the service of the Commission. It was in reality a great concession on their part to permit the Commission to watch over the keeping of the promises given by the Governor-General. The English, however, would allow the food to go in only on condition that American representatives of the Commission should exercise such supervision of the distribution as to make it impossible for the food to fall into German hands. Herein lay the chief function and the chief source of the power and prestige of the Commission. Unless the English had accepted its services, and had confidence in its work, they would never have permitted the continuation of shipments to Belgium. For assurance that all was well with the food distributions in Belgium they trusted neither the German promises nor the reports of any Belgian committees. The Belgians, in spite of their ability and patriotic devotion to their task, were yet under the heel of a military authority and subject to coercion. The Americans, on the other hand, as citizens of the greatest neutral state, were free from any such coercion and enjoyed an independence of movement and of action which gave the English people the utmost confidence in their work.

**The Obligations of the Commission.**—As the members of the British Government came to know Mr. Hoover better, they were inclined more and more to accept his word as to conditions in Belgium and they would accept no other system of control for imports to Belgium. It was this attitude of the English Government which made the continuation of the Commission indispensable to the provisionment of Belgium, and which gave to the Commission so much practical and diplomatic prestige that it became the only agency that had the possibility of preserving the Belgian people. Viscount (then Sir Edward) Grey of Falloden expressed this view clearly in a letter written to the Marquis de Villalobar on February 28, 1916, after the Commission had been at work nearly a year and a half. He was referring an important decision to Mr. Hoover, 'with whom I am obliged to deal in close co-operation in all such matters (relating to Belgian relief), he being in his capacity as head of the Commission for Relief in Belgium the only person directly and personally responsible for the manner in which the whole work both inside and outside of Belgium is carried on. If I may express one further hope, it is that all parties concerned in this matter, realising the impossibility of holding personally responsible either the diplomatic representatives of neutral powers or the citizens of a noble and unhappy country under foreign domination, will take into full account the heavy burden of responsibility resting on this great neutral Commission and will in every possible way lighten the burden by making its responsibility as easy to discharge as possible.'

**The Attitude of Belgian Leaders.**—The failure of the chief members of the Belgian National Committee to realise to the full this aspect of the Commission, and the attitude of the English toward the matter of Belgian relief, was at the basis of most of the rather painful misunderstandings which occasionally arose between the Commission and the Comité National in Belgium. The Belgians naturally felt that the care of the Belgian people, the distribution of food and of benevolent funds was essentially a Belgian domestic problem; that the Belgian leaders were sufficiently capable and self-sacrificing and patriotic to administer unaided the work of relief; that the funds used for the purchase of food were largely contributed by the Belgian Government to the Comité National or by the sympathetic world to the Belgian nation and that in consequence such funds should be controlled and disbursed exclusively by the Comité National; that the Commission for Relief in Belgium was to be regarded as the executive agent of the Comité National outside Belgium and as a useful co-operating body inside Belgium, able, because of its neutral character, to carry on negotiations with the occupying authorities and to afford protection to the supplies of the Comité National. According to this same view, the guarantees of the Germans were given to the neutral Ministers in Belgium in their capacity as representatives of their governments, and were hence to be regarded as a species of treaty between the German and the neutral governments; the Commission was held to be not directly interested in the guarantees, save as it represented the neutral Ministers in inspecting the distribution and reporting cases of violation. The German authorities were inclined to take this same view. They preferred regarding the provisionment of Belgium as a matter to be handled by a Belgian committee working under their supervision. They regarded the Americans of the Commission as rather troublesome intruders, who were not to be allowed to have an active voice in the distribution of food and who were to be induced to be content with seeing that the food did not go to the Germans. The German authorities considered the Commission as useful, in that it secured from the allied governments and neutral world permits to import food and money with which to pay for the food; as superfluous, when it showed any tendency to interfere with the way in which things were administered in Belgium.

**The Commission's View of its Responsibilities.**—The Commission, because of the responsibilities imposed upon it by the allied governments, could not accept these points of view. Neither the German promises nor the assurances of the Comité National or of the neutral Ministers would satisfy the British Government. The various guarantees given by the Germans were most certainly not treaty obligations that the neutral governments would insist upon maintaining. These guarantees were given, not to neutral countries, but to the Commission for Relief in Belgium; to the Ministers, not in their capacity as diplomatic representatives, but in their unofficial position as honorary chairmen and patrons of the Commission. Consequently it followed that the only body of men who could be held responsible for the conduct of the relief work in Belgium were Mr. Hoover and the other members of the Commission for Relief in Belgium. The British Government therefore continually insisted that the Commission must exercise an effective control over all distribution, whether of food, clothing or charity in Belgium, and must be prepared to answer to the allied governments for the strict observance by the Germans of the guarantees they had given. Consequently it was unavoidable that the Commission should, through its representatives in Belgium, exercise an effective control over the whole of the relief operations. The actual work of distribution should, of course, be done by the Belgian



committees, who alone were in a position to understand local conditions and most effectively administer the relief ; but this work had to be done under the supervision of the Commission, since the Commission was responsible to the allied governments for every act of the Belgian committees. The Belgians had shown great initiative, patriotism and ability in building up the great organisation of the Comité National. Hoover and his associates never had any desire to interfere in purely domestic problems or to criticise Belgian methods. They desired only to have such control over the distribution as would make it possible for them to give assurances to the Allies that all was well and thereby to make possible the indefinite continuation of imports.

The chief significance of the Commission, and most of its difficulties, arose because of the fact that it was a diplomatic compromise, not only in the beginning but throughout the whole of its activities. As a tremendous business organisation it had to carry on its work in a way satisfactory to Powers that were struggling with each other for life and death. It was only Mr. Hoover's ingenuity in persuading or bullying the various Powers into making the concessions demanded by the other groups that made possible the continuance of relief work. Many difficult negotiations were being carried on contemporaneously at all times from the first day of the Commission's work to the last. It often seemed that political, or diplomatic, or practical obstacles would bring the Commission to an abrupt end, but Mr. Hoover never despaired. As Ambassador Page said at a meeting of the National Committee for Relief in Belgium, Mr. Hoover always kept in mind the one idea that Belgium must be fed. Beside that the attitude of governments and diplomatic theories were of slight importance, and somehow, some way, Hoover always found a way out.

The Commission's Guarantees from the Germans.—The Commission had to obtain from the Germans the guarantees demanded by the allied governments ; or such compromise guarantees as the allied governments might be induced to accept. It had to secure from the Allies permission to continue its imports ; approval of its system of operation ; and sufficient grants of money, advanced in the form of loans to the Belgian Government, to enable it to carry out its program of imports. In a sense, the whole history of the Commission is a history of these dual negotiations to ensure the continuance of its work. The detailed narrative of all these negotiations would fill hundreds of pages. The texts of various guarantees secured from the Germans alone compose a dossier of three hundred typewritten folio pages. These guarantees have been translated, grouped and codified, and a digest of them has been made by Mr. W. A. Percy, a member of the Mississippi bar, and one of the volunteers of the Commission's service in Belgium. In a letter accompanying this admirable compilation, Mr. Percy spoke of the difficulties he had in making 'this collection of the guarantees concerning the ravitaillement of the occupied portion of France and Belgium, which were given by the occupying authorities to someone of the three intermediary agencies of that ravitaillement, to wit : the Patron Ministers, the Comité National or the Commission for Relief in Belgium. In searching through files for the documents composing this collection I have found it essential to take as guide some definition of the term "guarantee," and as there was no general accepted meaning of the term, I was forced to formulate a rough and ready definition of my own :

What was a 'Guarantee'?—"A guarantee is a promise made to one of the intermediary agencies by the occupying authorities to do, or not to do, or to allow to be done, some act affecting the rights and powers of the intermediary agencies

of that ravitaillement. The consideration for this promise, a consideration usually unexpressed, is the undertaking of the ravitaillement of the civil population by the Allied Powers or the intermediate agencies."

There is no possibility of locating a guarantee by the donor or donee thereof ; it may proceed from the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Berlin to His Excellency Mr. Gerard, or from an obscure Rittmeister in Northern France to the humblest of C.R.B. delegates ; both may be guarantees, but the glory of one differeth from the glory of the other.'

The Contract between the Belligerents.—In carrying on these negotiations, the Commission acted from the first as a semi-diplomatic body, sometimes dealing with the governments concerned through its diplomatic patrons, more often acting through personal interviews or correspondence of members of the Commission, and especially of Mr. Hoover, with the competent officials of the various governments. The Commission's work was based on a loose sort of contract between the belligerent governments, with the Commission acting as a negotiator and a depository and the executive agent for enforcing the contract. Such a position has probably never been occupied by a similar body. It has been one of the marvellous developments of the war that the Commission was able to fulfil its delicate mission and to ensure the provisioning of the Belgian population for more than three years of war.

#### NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE PROTECTION OF NATIVE FOODSTUFFS

The importance of the Protection of Native Food-supplies.—The first and most important of the series of negotiations to be undertaken by the Commission had as its purpose the securing of guarantees from the German authorities to protect the native products of Belgium from requisition. At the 'October conferences' it had been clearly recognised that the work of importing food could not be continued without such guarantees. If the Germans were to take the native foods and if these had to be replaced by imported food it was practically equivalent to shipping supplies directly to the German armies. The Allies would not have tolerated for a moment the making of shipments into Belgium under such conditions. On November 5, 1914, the American and Spanish Ambassadors in London arranged a conference with Sir Edward Grey for Hoover, Hunsiker, Shaler and their Spanish associate, Senor Don Jose Congosto. At this conference Hoover outlined the needs of the Belgian situation and explained the plans of the Commission. At the same time he presented to Sir Edward a memorandum asking for financial aid from the British Government. Sir Edward undertook to bring the application before his colleagues of the Government, but stated that the continued requisition of native food by the Germans made it impossible for the British to contribute money to the work of relief, as they would in effect be supplying food to the German army. Hoover replied that representations would be made to the German Government to ask for discontinuance of such requisitions. Sir Edward declared that if these representations achieved the desired result, he would himself be ready to assist the Commission even to the extent of granting financial aid.

Negotiations at Brussels.—The following week representations were made by the American and Spanish Ministers in Brussels to the General-Governor on the subject of the requisition of native food. On November 14 Baron von der Goltz, in writing to Whitlock declared the German authorities would be willing to discontinue all requisitions of Belgian

produce if they could be assured that the Allies would guarantee the continuance of the work of the Commission.

On November 21 Dr. von Sandt informed the Ministers in Brussels that, in accordance with their request, all requisitions of cereals would be stopped until December 10. Hoover, while in Brussels shortly after, discussed the matter with the Ministers and the German authorities. He learned that it would be necessary to have instructions from Berlin on any matter of such importance as a self-denying ordinance on the part of the German forces in Belgium not to touch native food.

**Hoover appeals to Berlin through Gerard.**—Hoover therefore wrote to Ambassador Gerard on December 5 explaining the situation, and asking that Gerard urge upon the German Government the advisability of discontinuing requisitions in Belgium. He stated that the initial friendly support from the British Government had not been continued and that as a result of the requisitions in Belgium the British had assumed an attitude that threatened to overthrow the whole of the Commission's efforts. 'I know,' he said, 'it is a delicate point for us to approach, but it must be vital to the Germans that we should continue this work, and if they could only view the matter from an enlightened position, I feel sure it would cause them to order a complete cessation of local requisitions.' At the same time Hoover suggested that the Germans, to show their good faith toward the Commission, might be willing to make a subscription to the Commission funds. 'We require about twenty million marks per month in order to provision this population and it struck me that, of all the opportunities which had yet been presented for the Germans to put themselves in the best form before the American people, this was the most excellent; and that, if they had the vision to take up the broad attitude that the poor of Belgium are the wards of all the Powers, and that the Germans are prepared to contribute their quota to their support, it would go a long way to break down a mass of criticism directed against them by America for the treatment of the Belgians. All of the destruction in Belgium and the levying of foodstuffs for the support of the army can be defended as a war measure, but to allow these people to starve while under their material control will raise a storm in the neutral world fifty times of the volume of that which has already been created by any local destruction. It is my belief that the belligerent nation which refuses to participate in the succour of these people will yet have to carry the brand of Cain as their murderers. On the other hand, any kindness held out to them in this time of dire necessity, will bring with itself gratitude which in after-history will wipe out nine-tenths of the charges of ruthlessness in war.'

**Zimmermann's Promise.**—Gerard immediately took up with the Imperial Foreign Office in Berlin the question of food requisition in Belgium. He was assisted in his representation by the Spanish Ambassador and the Dutch Minister. The General Government in Belgium had also probably intervened to urge such concessions as were necessary to ensure the continuance of the work of the Commission. At any rate, at a conference on December 26, Zimmermann, then Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 'gladly and without hesitation assured us (i.e. the neutral diplomats) that the commanding general in Belgium will give assurances to the American, Spanish and Netherlands Ministers in Belgium that the German military authorities will not make any further requisitions of food-supplies in Belgium while the international commissions are sending in food and for a reasonable time after the last delivery.'\*

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\* Telegrams of Ambassador Gerard to Hoover and to the State Department, December 26, 1914.

**A Change in the Wording of the Promise.**—On December 28 Gerard sent a copy of this telegram to Zimmermann with a request for the formal confirmation of the assurances given at the interview. In reply, Zimmermann, on December 31, wrote that ‘the Imperial Governor-General in Belgium will issue without delay an order prohibiting all the troops under his command from requisitioning food or fodder of any kind whatsoever which would require to be replaced by importations by the American Committee for Belgian Relief. The Governor-General will, in addition, authorise the Minister of the United States of America and the Spanish Minister at Brussels, as honorary chairmen of the committee, to convince themselves in any way which may to them appear advisable that the prohibition is observed most scrupulously.’\*

**Von Bissing’s Assurance to Whitlock.**—Two days later Whitlock reported to the State Department that he had that day ‘received assurances from Baron von Bissing, Governor-General in Belgium, that orders have been given forbidding all requisitions of foodstuffs of whatever sort in Belgian territory occupied by German troops, and that the protection thus afforded covers cattle and their food as well. He will give any reiterated assurances that we may desire on any occasion that foodstuffs will not be requisitioned and that we may establish and maintain any kind of control that we may see fit to adopt in connection with our relief work for the civil population. Similar assurances were given to my Spanish colleague.’\*

The assurances given to Gerard by Zimmermann on December 26 and to Whitlock by von Bissing on January 2 were of a very much more inclusive kind than that contained in Zimmermann’s letter of December 31. The first assurance was that ‘all foodstuffs of whatever sort’ would be free from requisition, but in sleeping on this assurance, Zimmermann had thought of a saving clause and his letter to Gerard stated that native foods ‘which would require to be replaced by importations by the American Committee for Belgian Relief’ would be exempt from requisitions. Apparently the change, significant as it was, escaped the attention of the American Ambassador, for, when writing Page on February 2, Gerard called attention to this change from the original assurance and stated that it would appear that the attitude of the German Government had undergone some modification after his visit. In talking to Hoover on February 2, Gerard explained the astonishment of the Spanish and Dutch Ministers, as well as of himself, that Zimmermann had so altered his original assurance, and, in commenting on the report of an outbreak of requisitions in the early part of January, said that it looked as if the Germans intended to denude the country before the question of replacement arose.

**The Army Order of January 21, 1915.**—Von Bissing, on January 21, in an army order, put into effect the assurance given by Zimmermann on December 31. This stated: ‘All troops under my command are forbidden to make requisitions, either of foodstuffs or of fodder, of any kind whatsoever, which may have to be replaced by importations made by the Comité National . . . I note that to the present the foodstuffs imported by the Comité comprise flour, wheat, rice, peas, beans, maize and sugar . . . All provisions of this nature are therefore exempt from any kind of requisition by the troops under my command, even upon payment for the same.’ Dr. von Sandt, in transmitting a copy of this order to Whitlock said: ‘I take great pleasure in availing myself of this occasion to thank your Excellency for the successful work done by the Commission for Relief in Belgium in the interest of humanity.’

\* *Am. J. Int. Law*, ix, July, 1915, pp. 325-6.

It should be noted that this order expressly limited the assurance of non-requisition to the stocks of food existing in the country at the time of issuance of the order, and did not extend to any new crops that might be produced.

The order marked a distinct triumph for the Commission, but it was only a preliminary step for obtaining that complete protection of native produce which was the most insistent demand of the Allies and the avowed purpose of the Commission itself. The negotiations were yet to pass through many difficult and tangled stages before the point was finally gained in April, 1916.

#### NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT FOR IMPORT PERMITS AND FOR SUBSIDIES, OCTOBER 1914 TO FEBRUARY 1915

**Early Negotiations with the British Government.**—Inseparably bound up with the negotiations for the protection of Belgian native foods were the steps taken by the Commission in London to secure substantial support from the allied governments. In a way it can be said that it was Mr. Hoover's purpose to negotiate a kind of contract between the Germans and the English by which the Germans would give up all requisitions in Belgium in consideration of the English giving assurances that the Commission's import would be allowed to continue indefinitely and that the allied governments would contribute financially to the support of the Commission.

The early negotiations with the British Government for permits to send food into Belgium have already been referred to. On October 5 an official of the Board of Trade had told the Belgian Minister that food could be exported from England to Belgium under the protection of the American diplomatic representatives in London and Brussels. As soon as the American Government authorised its representatives to lend their aid to the Belgian relief work, the question of getting permits was taken up again with the Foreign Office. The Belgian delegates, Francqui and Baron Lambert, were given an assurance by Sir Edward Grey on October 20 that the British Government were not stopping 'any food-supplies going to Rotterdam from neutral countries in neutral ships which we are satisfied are not for the use of the German Government or army; and we shall not therefore interfere with the food-supplies of the civil population of Belgium unless we have reason to suppose that the assurance given by Marshal von der Goltz to the American and Spanish Ministers is not being carried out.'\*

Upon receiving this assurance, Mr. Shaler had completed arrangements for the purchase of 2,000 tons of supplies to be exported in accordance with the promise given by the Board of Trade on October 5, that permits would be issued for such a shipment to Belgium. The British Government on October 22 withdrew the permit and for several days the Commission was in great difficulty, wandering from one government office to another in the effort to get the necessary authorisations to make it possible to ship the Shaler purchase immediately to Belgium. Ambassador Page finally intervened and a meeting was held with representatives of the Foreign Office on October 25. At this meeting the British officials finally agreed to permit the quantities already purchased to be shipped, but the Commission was advised in the future to buy its supplies elsewhere than in the United Kingdom.

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\* From letter of Sir Arthur Nicholson to Ambassador Page, October 20, 1914.

The Appeal to the British Government for Financial Aid.—A meeting with Sir Edward Grey on November 5 has already been referred to. At this time Hoover appealed to Sir Edward Grey for financial support of the Commission by the allied governments. Sir Edward Grey's reply was the statement that if the Germans would cease requisitions of native foodstuffs, the British Government might be inclined to grant a subsidy.

Negotiations with the Belgian Government.—During the month of November, Hoover had had frequent meetings with officials of the Belgian Government to discuss the financial operations of the Commission. He had pointed out to them that the program could not be carried out for more than a few months unless an assured income of at least one million pounds a month could be made available. The Belgian Government advanced a million pounds to serve as a working capital for the Commission, and agreed to do what they could to obtain a regular monthly loan from the French and English Governments which should be turned over to the Commission to be used in purchasing 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. But all negotiations for obtaining such a subsidy from the British Government were held up until the Germans should give the necessary guarantees to protect the native food and should further promise to cease money levies in Belgium. The promise given by the Germans at the end of December that all native stocks in Belgium would be exempt from requisition provided the basis for further negotiations by the Commission. About the same time, the German Government in Belgium announced that after January 15 it would make no more requisitions of any kind in Belgium, except against payment in cash, and that no more irregular levies or indemnities on provinces or communes would be made.

A Monthly War-levy imposed on Belgium.—In place of the requisition of supplies and the sporadic levying of indemnities a war tax of forty million francs per month for a period of twelve months was imposed on Belgium. This sum was to be guaranteed by the Deputations Permanentes of the various provinces, and to be paid to the Germans in the form of notes issued by the Société Générale de Belgique on the security of the promises of repayment of the Deputations Permanentes. The announcement of this war tax was a further serious embarrassment to Mr. Hoover in his negotiations to secure subsidies from the allied governments.

In his letter to Gerard, December 6, Hoover had referred to the various indemnities and taxes levied by the Germans in Belgium and had suggested that 'if the money levies were confined to a general scheme of monthly indemnities, according to the plan proposed by the Germans, there would be much less objection on the part of the allied governments to assist the Commission, especially if the Germans at the same time would announce that in future they would pay in cash for all supplies taken in Belgium.' As Hoover put it: 'In other words, if the Germans take money out of Belgium, it may indirectly cause great hardship, but it does not starve the Belgians, because the whole problem of feeding Belgium is that of actual material foodstuff required, which we propose to introduce into the country in sufficient amounts to supplement the stores which are already there.' If therefore the Germans would agree to leave to the Belgians their own products, Hoover felt that the matter of money indemnity was of less importance. When he came to negotiating with the British for the subsidies needed by the Commission, he found however that they were much incensed at the German levy and were not disposed, so long as the Germans continued to exact money from Belgium, to assist the Commission by subsidies.

**Financial Difficulties of the Commission.**—By January 1 it had become evident that the program of the Commission, requiring as it did a monthly expenditure which now approached a million and a half pounds, could not be carried out unless a large governmental subsidy could be secured. The appeal to charity had brought great results, but these seemed very small in comparison with the amount of money needed to continue the provisioning of Belgium. Hoover therefore resolved to make use of every resource at his command to overcome the opposition of the British Government to his proposal that the allied governments should subsidise the work of the Commission by means of loans to the Belgian Government.

On January 6 he wrote Lord Eustace Percy: ‘We have a food-supply engaged . . . sufficient to carry us until the middle of April, and we are in round figures about £1,000,000 short of being able to pay for this. . . . It costs us about £1,200,000 a month to provide the minimum which we are endeavouring to reach, and of this about £600,000 of food is sold to that portion of the population which can raise the money to pay for it. About £400,000 is a dead loss through the support of free canteens and has to be got from the charity of the world.’

Even the £600,000 received monthly in Belgium from the resale of food could not be transferred to London for use or for making further purchases unless the English would approve the exchange arrangements proposed by the Commission. Hoover wrote Percy that he could not see any reason for the English objecting to this exchange business, ‘because we are not introducing gold into Belgium nor abstracting gold from England any more than is abstracted in the normal purchase of foodstuffs from abroad. The people to whom we make payment would be entirely Belgian or Belgian institutions. Aside from this method, however, which is fortuitous, it appears to us that we have got to have some support implemented by governments. If we could make payment in Brussels to support the communal governments or other organs of the Belgian Government, and if the Belgian Government in turn could borrow money from the Allies and hand it to us, this would completely solve the question. The amount involved would be £300,000 a month.’

**Sir Edward Grey makes an Offer of Aid.**—A meeting was arranged on January 13 with Sir Edward Grey to consider Hoover’s proposals. Sir Edward opened the conference by stating half-humorously to Hoover that the latter need not hope for financial support from the British Government, and went on to say that as long as the Germans continued to levy indemnities in Belgium, the British Government could not be expected to contribute to the relief work. Hoover remarked that he had been told previously that the British could not help the Commission because of the food-requisitions of the Germans in Belgium, and that he made representations in this matter to Mr. Gerard, who had been able ultimately to secure from Berlin an undertaking that no more food would be requisitioned in Belgium. Hoover felt, he said, that as the Commission had succeeded in this matter it was entitled to support from the British Government, and he was disappointed that further stipulations were now raised. He thought it would be only fair to let him know if the Commission could expect financial aid from the British Government if it should be successful in further representations which he would undertake to make to the German Government. Sir Edward, convinced by Hoover’s terse statement of the case, said that he personally thought that the Commission would be entitled to such financial support if it were to succeed in its further negotiations, but that he could not commit his

colleagues. He expressed approval at the same time of the exchange arrangements of the Commission, and thought this would be accepted by the British Government subject to the restriction that the moneys obtained in England were to be used solely for the purchase of foodstuffs and the payments in Belgium would be made to Belgians only.

The British Government and the Exchange Plan.—For several days after this interview Hoover received no information as to what action had been taken on his proposals. On January 19 he wrote again to Lord Eustace Percy, saying: ‘I should be glad to know if there is any hope of immediate progress in the exchange business from Brussels, as I am rapidly drifting into the most intense financial difficulties, having large payments to make at the end of the week, while I am just simply busted.’ A meeting was then arranged for Hoover with Lloyd George, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. This meeting was the occasion on which Hoover scored the most signal triumph of his diplomatic career, for, by his clear concise statement of the situation and his eloquent advocacy of the cause of the Belgians, he won over Lloyd George, who had previously been an opponent of the Belgian relief work, and enlisted him as a hearty supporter of the Commission’s activities.

Meeting of Hoover and Lloyd George.—This conversation was to have most far-reaching effects, as through the support of Lloyd George the desired subsidies were ultimately to be accorded the Commission. Hoover explained to Lloyd George the financial difficulties of the Commission and the necessity of putting into effect the exchange arrangements proposed to ensure the continuance of the Commission’s work. Lloyd George replied that he had put his veto on the project because he felt that, indirect as it might be, it was yet certainly assisting the enemy: in the first place, the Commission was providing the Belgians more resources with which to stand requisition of food by the Germans; further, the Commission would be giving the people money with which to pay the German levies; and more than all this, the Commission, in relieving the Germans from the necessity of feeding the civil population was directly prolonging the war, which was bound to be of a wholly economic character and would be ultimately won by the Allies by economic pressure. Lloyd George expressed the belief that Germany in the last resort would provision the people of Belgium and said he was wholly opposed to the Commission’s operations, benevolent and humane though they were, and that therefore he could not see his way clear to grant Hoover’s request.

Hoover states the Commission’s case.—Another man would have been discouraged and overwhelmed by such a statement, but not so Hoover. Taking up point by point the contentions of Lloyd George, he answered them effectively and convincingly. He showed that through the guarantee received by the American Ambassador in Berlin from the Imperial Government there would be no more food requisitions after January 1, and said that he believed the Germans would respect this guarantee just as they had the promise given in October not to touch the food imported by the Commission. Hoover argued that the food imports of the Commission did not increase the resources available for money levies since the Commission was introducing no new money into the country, but was simply giving circulation to the money already existing, and there was no danger of the Germans taking the money collected for the foodstuffs as this was under the protection of the American Minister. He combated most vigorously the idea that the Germans would ever feed Belgium, and declared that the Commission had undertaken its work with the greatest reluctance and only when convinced that the population would starve unless America intervened and converted the hitherto negative quality of neutrality into a



positive quality. Then he went on to state the German position already outlined at the beginning of this chapter. He was not defending this attitude, he said, he was only presenting it as representing the point of view firmly held by the Germans. Already in the Meuse Valley in France people were dying from starvation, there had been riots in Belgium caused by hunger, and the population would already have been decimated had it not been for the timely intervention of the Commission.

Lloyd George broke into Hoover's discourse denouncing this whole attitude of the Germans as one too monstrous to be contemplated. 'But,' said Hoover, 'be that as it may, it is yet a fact to be reckoned with.' Then, taking up the question of the attitude of England toward the relief in Belgium, he pointed out that Britain had made the invasion of Belgium its *casus belli*; it had avowedly come into the war to vindicate the rights of small nations and to guarantee the neutrality of small states; it had declared its motive to be the determination to assure the continuance of democracy as against autoocracy in government.

It would therefore be indeed an empty and tragic victory for England if one of the most democratic of nations should be extinguished in the war by a starvation which Great Britain was in a position to avert. 'The English people,' said Hoover, 'are strong enough, large-minded enough, to disregard doubtful military advantages in favour of a policy which would ensure the survival of these people. The obligation of England seems to me to go even further than mere acquiescence in our work, which extends an opportunity to the English to add to their laurels by showing magnanimity to the Belgian people, for such magnanimity would outlast all the bitterness of this war.'

**Lloyd George is Convinced.**—At this point Lloyd George rose and abruptly interrupted the session, saying: 'I am convinced, Mr. Hoover, you have my permission to go ahead in this work.' Turning to his colleagues he said he would be obliged to them if they would settle the details of the machinery necessary to set into effect Hoover's proposals. Then, turning to Hoover, he apologised for having to go away, and said that he felt that the world would long be indebted to the American people for the most magnanimous action which neutrality had ever yet taken.

From this time on the attitude of the British Government became much more sympathetic toward the Commission and it gave, not only its approval, but its money and its ships and its constant co-operation to the Commission. The immediate result of the interview with Lloyd George was a definite sanction of the plan of exchange on January 21, on the conditions agreed upon by Hoover and Sir Edward Grey.

Hoover had next to enter into a new series of negotiations with the German authorities to attempt to get them to give up their monthly levy on Belgium and to make the other concessions which the British Government made a condition to the granting of financial support to the Commission.

#### NEGOTIATIONS TO SECURE GOVERNMENTAL SUBSIDIES, JANUARY—FEBRUARY 1915.

**An illustration of Hoover's Methods.**—Hoover had learned from personal experience that the only effective way to get what he wanted from governmental sources was to go himself directly to the ultimate authority and to state frankly and directly his position. This may not be diplomatic procedure, but Hoover cared little about diplomatic nicety

and was ever resolved to leave no effort untried to attain his ends. He therefore decided to go himself to Berlin in order to put his case directly to the Imperial Government. On January 26 he left London for Folkestone, intending to proceed directly to Berlin to present the proposal of Sir Edward Grey that the British Government would provide financial support to the Commission if the Germans would renounce their indemnity in Belgium. As he travelled through the hills and woods of Kent, he turned over the situation in his mind, trying to think out the most effective way of bringing pressure to bear to support his mission. It occurred to him that, as the Germans were still assiduously courting American public opinion, it would be a great help to him if he could arouse in America a public demand that the work of the Commission should be continued and could secure the support of prominent Germans in America. He therefore postponed his trip to Berlin and returned to London. He immediately prepared a statement to be sent out through the Associated Press. He showed this to Lord Eustace Percy, who at first raised objections and suggested certain alterations, which Hoover would not make because they were of the nature of an accusation of the Germans which might defeat his ends. After some deliberation he was finally informed that he could send out his interview as originally prepared. On January 30 this statement was issued to the Press. In it Hoover emphasised the difficulties of his position and called attention to the responsibility of the British and German Governments.

An Associated Press Dispatch.—‘The Commission,’ he said, ‘takes the gloomiest possible view of the ultimate future. The problem is rapidly growing beyond the reach of private philanthropy. With the help that the Commission hopes for from America during the next few months, and with financial arrangements which have been completed for loans and exchange, we can maintain supplies at the rate of six million dollars per month to the end of March. Before that time, however, three new forces will intervene, which make the whole situation materially worse. The first of these is the rapid exhaustion of the limited vegetable and meat supplies in Belgium, which will necessitate a constant increase in the amount of food shipped to that country; the second is that three million of French people inside the German lines will be reduced to the condition of the Belgians in another thirty days and our problem will be to feed not seven millions but ten millions; the third is, that while a considerable portion of the Belgian people have hitherto been able to pay for their food, the stoppage of the industrial clock and the drain of indemnities is now driving them in larger and larger proportions to the wall. If all these people are to be kept alive, some one has got to furnish some way or somehow from twelve to fifteen million dollars’ worth of food every month from April until August, when the new harvest will lessen the quantity required.’

In this interview he restated his understanding of the reasons why each of the belligerents had refused to accept the responsibility for the feeding of the Belgians, and went on to explain that there was yet a possibility of the Germans and the Allies making such concessions as would permit the feeding of Belgium to go on through the medium of the Commission. He plainly intimated that the allied governments had a moral obligation to Belgium which they could only discharge by providing the Commission with the financial support necessary to save the civil population from starvation. The Commission, he said, would continue its work as best it could even if it did not receive this support, but it would be able to save only a small proportion of the population. ‘The neutral world and future generations will lay the responsibility for the decimation of these peoples at the proper

door, and no mixture of military reason and diplomatic excuse will cloud the issue. The magnificent generosity of the American people, which has proved neutrality no barren negation, will have been wasted unless each of the belligerents assumes his rightful share in saving from starvation these millions of men, women and children. We have stated our case frankly and bluntly. Our only court of appeal is American public opinion and it is for America to say whether a crime shall be committed which will bring this generation down in infamy to posterity.'

A Cablegram to the Secretary of State.—At the same time he sent a long cablegram to Bryan, Secretary of State, through the London Embassy. In this he stated that the growing needs in Belgium would soon involve an increase in supplies from the value of six million to ten million dollars monthly and that the Commission would very soon reach the end of its available resources. He continued: 'I believe the allied governments—despite their view that they have no responsibility and that it is a military disadvantage to them that these people should be fed from neutral sources, and that the duty lies on the Germans,—could be brought to make substantial contributions, provided the Germans would cease to wring monetary indemnities from these people and would extend their undertaking as to requisitioning foodstuffs to cover all native food supplies. To have this population thus fed must be for military reasons of vast advantage to the Germans, which far outweighs the value of the money which they secure from their present methods. From a humane point of view, if this situation is driven to its logical extreme the moral responsibility for the decimation of the population must be laid at the German door.

'I am arriving in Berlin February 1 for the purpose of making representations to the German Government and to assure them that if they would agree to stop all requisitions of every character, and would do so conditionally upon the Allies giving adequate financial support to this Commission, I have reason to believe that I can carry out the allied end of the contract. I need support from the Germans in America. I therefore appeal to you, not in your official capacity, but as a leading American in a position to discuss this question in an influential way with Bernstorff and Dernburg. The Germans cannot afford to have these issues tried in the court of American public opinion and they can well afford, not only from the point of view of military advantage, but also of American public opinion and above all of humanity, to have this question settled on the above lines. I believe the allied governments have every confidence in the integrity of the Commission and its ability to carry out the work, and, great as the sacrifices may be on our part, we should find ample compensation for the carrying on of this task in the prestige which it would win for our country and its ideals.'

Having thus started the ball rolling, Hoover went on to Berlin, arriving there February 1. On his way he received a letter from Whitlock containing a copy of von Bissing's army order of January 21, forbidding all requisitions of native foodstuffs of the kinds imported by the Commission.

In Berlin he met Dr. Wickliffe Rose, of the Rockefeller Foundation, who, after leaving Belgium, had made a tour of inspection in Poland and Germany to investigate the situation of populations who had suffered in the war. Rose had been in touch with the German authorities and informed Hoover that the German Government would probably be willing to give the guarantees desired.

Gerard on German Promises.—On February 2 Hoover had a long conference with Gerard, who expressed his surprise and indignation that the Germans, after having promised

to cease the requisition of all foods in Belgium, had juggled with their words and limited their guarantee to those foods of the sort imported by the Commission. He said it was a disgrace that the American public should be asked to furnish food when the outbreak of requisitions in Belgium made it look as if the Germans intended to denude the country before the question of replacement arose. He told Hoover that he had heard that local commandants in Belgium had stated to the people that the Americans would feed them as soon as their own supplies were gone. Gerard said that he felt strongly that the Commission should withdraw entirely from the field until these wretched people were better protected from the military. He had confidence in the sincerity of the German civil officials, but recognised the fact that before an order could be carried out it was within the power of a hundred petty despots of the army in times like those in which they were living.

Hoover Presents his Case to the Imperial German Government.—In company with Gerard, Hoover had several conferences with representatives of the Imperial German Government. He presented three memoranda. The first was a note 'setting out the basis of reorganised relations which the Commission for Relief in Belgium is desirous of effecting with the Imperial German Government'; the second was a memorandum upon 'the problems confronting the Commission for Relief in Belgium if it is to continue the provisioning of the civil population of Belgium'; the third was a copy of a memorandum embodying the Commission's understanding of the attitude of the belligerent governments toward the provisioning of Belgium.

In the first memorandum the organisation and purpose of the Commission was fully described and its financial problems were outlined in detail. It was shown that the funds obtained from sale of food in Belgium could not be made directly available for new purchases and that, as the original capital was practically exhausted, some means must be found of securing new funds; that philanthropic sources were quite inadequate to meet the problem; that the attitude recently taken by the British Government had resulted in the breakdown of the first financial arrangements by which the Belgian Government could advance money; that the needs of Belgium were increasing rather than diminishing and hence that increased funds must be immediately secured if the situation in Belgium was to be saved; that the provisionment could not longer be carried on by the Commission unless the belligerent governments could reach an agreement for providing adequate assistance.

It was stated also that the feeding of Belgium was of the greatest military importance to the Germans, who would hardly, in any case, care to assume the responsibility for the starvation of the Belgian population. The Commission therefore wanted a definite assurance that the Germans would carry out rigorously their promise not to requisition foodstuffs of any kind whatsoever in Belgium. The Commission felt that the Germans could hardly be expected to furnish food to Belgium and had applied to the Allies for financial support. The Belgian Government had agreed to supply the funds, but it in turn was dependent upon the support which it should receive from the French and British Governments. 'These governments,' said Hoover, 'positively refused to help, on the ground that they would not provide public money for food-purchases because this would amount to assisting their enemy by relaxing the economic strain which he would otherwise be under to support the Belgians himself.' The memorandum went on to state that the allied governments did not object to neutrals supplying food. The British Government after repeated representations on the part of the Commission had finally stated that they were prepared to

alter their attitude, but could not because of the continued levying of food and money contributions in Belgium. They had agreed that if the Germans would renounce these, they would give financial assistance. The Commission therefore placed the matter squarely before the German Government and asked of them the undertakings which had been made a condition of financial support by the Allies.

The proposed Agreement. The second memorandum was the agreement by which the Commission proposed to provide a definite settlement of the Commission's problems. In this the Commission declared its willingness to continue the provisioning of the civil population of Belgium and, if desired, of Northern France, and outlined the organisation which it would effect for carrying on this work. The German Government was asked to confirm its previous undertakings: first, that all imported foodstuffs would be free from any sort of requisition, seizure or interference on the part of the military authorities and should be reserved for the sole use of the civil population of Belgium and the North of France; second, the foodstuffs should be free from all import duties and taxes and should be allowed freedom of movement over the railroads; third, the members and delegates of the Commission should receive adequate passes permitting them to move freely through the country in their automobiles to supervise the control of food distribution, the Commission guaranteeing that every member should continue to observe scrupulously the utmost neutrality; fourth, all ships on the high seas or in port should be guaranteed protection.

The German promise not to make requisitions in Belgium was to be maintained as long as the Commission continued its work. Furthermore, in consideration of the continuance of its work by the Commission and of sufficient financial support from the allied governments to provide an importation of not less than 60,000 tons monthly, the Germans should agree to abandon the collection of the monthly forty million francs and should promise not to collect any other indemnities or taxes during the period of occupation.

These promises were to be binding only so long as the allied governments continued to pay for and facilitate the import into Belgium of the specified minimum quantity of foodstuffs.

The Germans refuse to abandon the War-levy in Belgium. The officials of the Imperial Government were very conciliatory in their attitude and expressed to the Ambassador and Mr. Hoover their appreciation of the work of the Commission. They declared that the Imperial Government would gladly confirm all the engagements it had previously taken with reference to the work of the Commission, and would strictly enforce the order that native foodstuffs should be exempt from requisition. They expressed their regret, however, that the Imperial Government could not agree to give up the monthly levy in Belgium. This, they claimed, was an act of a military government justified by international law, as the money was levied to pay the expenses of military administration of the country by the occupying forces. Hoover discussed with them in detail the conditions under which the Commission was working in Belgium and they assured him that every possible facility in the matter of liberty of movements and of passes for delegates would be accorded by the General Government. They did not conceal their anxiety lest the Commission should suspend its work, but nevertheless would not yield on the point of the indemnity.

German Concessions.—While Hoover had not obtained the full measure of concessions that he had asked, he had yet secured from the highest German authority a clear and definite confirmation of the various guarantees already given and had succeeded in

getting the confidence of the higher authorities to such an extent that they were prepared to give special attention to the Commission and its problems and to do everything in their power to facilitate the work in Belgium. From Hoover's telegram to Bryan it would appear that the concessions obtained were all that he had really expected. With these new assurances from Berlin he believed that he might be able to secure from the Allies financial support for the Commission.

Hoover in Brussels.—The plan for a Relief Bank.—On his way back to London he visited Brussels for the third time in two months and there had conferences with the members of the Commission and the Comité National, with the American Minister and with Governor-General von Bissing and members of his staff. He discussed with Francqui the financial situation and went over with him a plan to obtain money in America in case subsidies should not be forthcoming from the allied governments. According to this plan a relief-bank would be established in Belgium with a large capital subscription, which would take over all receipts from the foodstuffs sold in Belgium, and would loan this money in Belgium on good security to communal governments, institutions and individuals. It would thus in the course of the operations of the Commission collect a very large sum which it would hold as security for a loan to be negotiated in America, to be paid off after the war when the affairs of the Commission could be liquidated. Francqui and Hoover believed that in this way the Commission might be able to obtain sufficient money to carry on its work, even if the negotiations with the Allies failed. An official of the Finance Department of the German Government, with whom Hoover had conferred in Berlin, was in Brussels during Hoover's visit there and assured him that the German Government would approve the plan for a relief-bank and if necessary would give the guarantees that its funds would be exempt from any interference on the part of the German authorities. This, of course, would have been the first condition for the negotiations for any loan in America based on security to be held in Belgium by the relief-bank.

Hoover's Conference with von Bissing.—While in Brussels, Hoover attempted to settle various matters, such as that of passes for the delegates of the Commission which were giving trouble. In an interview with the Governor-General he emphatically expressed the Commission's position and found von Bissing to be rather adversely inclined. Although von Bissing was quite pleased that the Commission was importing large quantities of food, he had become rather annoyed by the constant activity of the American delegates and told Hoover that he thought the Commission had already too much liberty of action. He assured Hoover, however, that as far as the guarantees were concerned, the General Government would faithfully adhere to all the engagements which they had taken.

Before leaving Brussels, Hoover wrote a long letter to von Bissing, giving in concise form the outlines of the Commission's understanding of the privileges which it should have. This will be referred to later on, when the questions of negotiations for passports is discussed.

Hoover returns to London.—Hoover returned to London, and on February 15 had a long discussion with Ambassador Page about the results of his Berlin trip. Later in the day he called on Lord Eustace Percy and informed him that the German Government would not abandon the indemnity in Belgium, but that he hoped through negotiations then in progress with the Germans to secure the funds necessary for the Commission by the formation of a relief-bank in Belgium and by obtaining a loan in America against securities to be held by this bank. He asked Lord Eustace that in the statement to be issued by the British Government about the Belgian relief situation, nothing should be

said to prejudice the standing of the Commission with the Germans or with the general public, as the lives of seven million people hung on such resources as the Commission could command and the political ideas or national views of no one could excuse the sacrifice of these people.

The Foreign Office Statement of February 22.—The following day Lord Eustace sent Hoover a draft of the proposed statement of the Foreign Office. The alterations suggested by Hoover were adopted in a statement finally published on February 22 in the form of a letter from Sir Edward Grey to Hoover. This statement reviewed the negotiations just described; it recalled the British Government's promise to permit food from neutral countries to go to Belgium under the supervision of the Commission and referred to the unusual shipping privileges granted by the Government to the Commission as well as to the contribution of £100,000 made in October; it mentioned the offer of the British Government to subsidise the Commission through loans to the Belgian Government, provided the Germans abandoned their food requisitions and military levies in Belgium. Sir Edward went on to state that since Hoover's negotiations had failed to achieve these objects, and since the Germans were to continue their monthly indemnities, the proposed arrangement must be regarded as having broken down. The British Government would maintain its former attitude toward the work, and the offer of financial support would remain open in the event of the Germans receding from their position, but for the moment the idea of a *direct* subvention of Government funds to the Commission must remain in abeyance. Sir Edward added: 'I cannot conclude this letter without expressing our appreciation of the generosity of the American people and the admirable organisation established by the Commission, which alone have made this work possible. The people of this country will, I am sure, recognise in your work a prominent example of the qualities of efficiency and public spirit which distinguish the many neutral services rendered by Americans in Europe at the present time.'

New Conferences with Lloyd George.—This letter of Sir Edward Grey, while apparently a final refusal of financial support by the British Government, did not in the least discourage Hoover. He had communicated to the Belgian Government as well as to Lord Eustace Percy the results of his negotiations in Berlin and Brussels. On February 17 he was invited to call on Lloyd George in his office at the Treasury Department. The Belgian Minister of Finance, Monsieur Van der Vyvere, and the Belgian Minister to England, the Count de Lalaing, were also present at this meeting. The problem of financing the operations of the Commission was thoroughly discussed. Lloyd George stated that in view of a refusal of the Germans to give up their monthly levies in Belgium, it would be impossible for the British Government to make a *direct* subvention to the *charitable work* of the Commission, but he pointed out that the possibility of indirect aid through loans to the Belgian Government was not excluded. The question of how this aid could best be given formed the chief topic of discussion at this very important conference. Lloyd George said that a Cabinet meeting would be held at noon on the following day to review the question of relief in Belgium; that several of the Ministers, on military grounds, were opposed to the continuance of the Commission's work; that his own views had been greatly altered by his conferences and correspondence with Mr. Hoover and that he was prepared to support the Commission unequivocally in its humanitarian task. Hoover informed him that the Commission had five million pounds' worth of food *en route* to Belgium and that one million pounds of this represented American gifts. M. Van der Vyvere stated that his

government had so far advanced two million pounds and that an equivalent sum in francs was being expended in Belgium through the Comité National to pay Belgian Government obligations and make loans to communes.

Before the conference broke up, Lloyd George asked Hoover to review to him some arguments Hoover had previously made so that he could have them ready to repeat to his colleagues. Hoover agreed to do this and that evening sent a memorandum which reviewed the work and problems of the Commission in view of possible assistance from the British Government.

**A Subsidy Granted Belgian Government for 'Mr. Hoover's Fund.'**—The following day, February 18, at 5 o'clock, Hoover and Van der Vyvere were asked to meet Lloyd George at the Treasury for another conference. They were told by Lloyd George that his party had carried the day at the Cabinet meeting, and that the British Government had decided to recommend to the French Government a budgetary allowance to the Belgian Government which included one million pounds a month for Mr. Hoover's fund, half of this sum to come from each government. This subsidy was to continue until the end of June.

Such a triumphant solution of the financial problem of the Commission had come rather more quickly than even Hoover had dared to anticipate. The seed so well sown when Hoover had converted Lloyd George had borne abundant fruit, for the Chancellor of the Exchequer had become a staunch supporter of the Commission and to him was due the aid which made it possible to continue the work of the Commission on a scale adequate to the growing needs. When Hoover thanked Lloyd George for his interest and assistance and told him the decision of the British Government had taken a great load off the hearts of the members of the Commission, Lloyd George smiled and replied: 'You have made a good fight and deserve to win out.' Indeed, no better summary could be made of the untiring efforts with which Hoover and his associates had devoted themselves to the task of aiding the population in Belgium.

**The Use of the Subsidy.**—Under the financial arrangement then adopted, the British and French Governments jointly advanced to the Belgian Government an additional sum of one million pounds monthly, earmarked 'for Mr. Hoover's Fund.' The Belgian Finance Minister turned this money over each month to the Commission, which expended it in purchasing food and in delivering it to Belgium. There the financial responsibility was assumed by the Comité National, which, by signing the bills of lading of all shipments received, acknowledged responsibility for the value of the supplies. The Comité National disposed of all funds received from the provincial committees for the food delivered to them, in accordance with its agreement with the Commission and in pursuance of its understanding with the Belgian Government. Its operations were, of course, checked and inspected by the German authorities, but as they had previously approved the financial program they did not interfere with the disposition of the funds, save in exceptional cases. The Commission was therefore not responsible for the manner of the distribution or the disposition of these funds. Its financial obligation ended when the Comité National acknowledged the receipt of the supplies. The Commission maintained, however, in Belgium its own auditors to check over the transactions and accounts of the Comité National and of the provincial committees, in order to be able to report to the British and Belgian Governments as to the disposition of all funds. In this way the financial operations of the Comité National were supervised, but not controlled, by the Commission.

The Commission seeks Engagements to ensure its Continuance.—In order to



be able to complete his agreement with the Germans, Hoover wished to secure an assurance from the British Government that shipments to Belgium would not be interfered with by the English authorities so long as the Germans lived up to their engagements. He therefore laid before Lord Eustace Percy on February 19 a memorandum of an engagement to be given by the British Government that in continuance of its previously expressed benevolent attitude toward the work of the Commission, the British Government was prepared to agree that it would facilitate the passage of ships carrying cargoes of foodstuffs for the civil population of Belgium until the war is over. This undertaking was to be subject to the following conditions: first, that this foodstuff was to be delivered solely to the civil population in Belgium, and in this connection the British Government insisted that the Commission maintain such membership in Belgium and keep such records as would enable it to present evidence from time to time that these foodstuffs had reached the civil population; second, that the German authorities adhere to their agreement with the Commission, that there should be no requisition of indigenous foodstuffs, livestock or fodder throughout the occupied zone in Belgium during the period of importations by the Commission; third, that the undertaking made to the Commission by the German Government that the Commission's foodstuffs should not be interfered with should be made binding until the war is over.

A couple of days later, Hoover was assured that the British Government were willing to accept this memorandum and to make the engagements therein described.

**The Engagements as a Basis for Loans.**—The chief object in negotiating these agreements was to establish a permanent basis for the work of the Commission and to permit it to continue its work as long as there was need for it, i.e. until the end of the war. The subsidies accorded by the Allies were to be continued only until the end of June. In the winter of 1915–16 the need would be much greater than ever before. The Commission had begun to realise that the war might drag along indefinitely and that its work must be continued in one form or another, if the results already achieved were not to be destroyed later on by a period of famine. In order to secure loans in America or elsewhere on the security of moneys and credits to be held in Belgium, it would be necessary to have definite agreements with the belligerent governments that they would permit the work to go on indefinitely under the guarantees required. The English at the end of February gave a practical assurance that if the Germans lived up to the conditions mentioned in the English undertaking, the imports of the Commission would not be interfered with by the English Government, but it was still necessary to get from the Germans an assurance that the guarantees they had given would likewise be maintained indefinitely. The Comité National was even more concerned on this point than the Commission, for they represented the people who would suffer. As soon, therefore, as the results of Hoover's negotiations in England were made known in Brussels, the Comité National appealed to the Governor-General to get the conditions required by the English agreed to by the German authorities.

**The Comité National seeks an Assurance from von Bissing.**—On March 9 a letter was addressed to the Governor-General by the Comité National exposing the situation. It was said that the relief organisations had thus far been able 'principally because of the guarantees and privileges granted to them by the General Government to fulfil the task of assisting and provisioning the Belgian civil population.' The Comité National explained the financial difficulties of the relief organisations, and said that the work had been made possible only by the advances made by the Belgian Government and by the authorisation

given to Belgian banks to place at the disposal of the Commission in London in gold their foreign credits : but as this latter source was exhausted, it was now becoming increasingly difficult to obtain the necessary funds. Von Bissing was therefore requested to permit Francqui to go to London to negotiate some financial arrangement that would ensure the funds necessary for the continuance of the relief. 'But these negotiations can have no favourable results unless the Comité National can give an assurance to financiers to whom they intend to apply that the British Government promises to allow the vessels of our Comité to pass for the duration of the war and a similar assurance that the Imperial German Government promises during the time of occupation never to requisition any of the supplies imported by the Commission for Relief in Belgium and not to requisition any of the articles necessary for the feeding of men and animals at present in the country, or which this country will produce in the future. We take the liberty of calling your Excellency's attention to the fact that in reality the declaration which we are asking him to make has already been made ; for the Imperial German Government has given the assurance that none of the goods which must be replaced by our importations are to be requisitioned.

'All Belgian Foodstuffs to be immune from Requisition.'—'As our Comité to-day is importing wheat, oats, rye, potatoes, maize, oil-cakes, peas, meats, preserves, milk, etc., in reality all foods produced by our soil, it may be seen that the declaration which we are asking from your Excellency has no other real significance than that of confirming and combining the guarantees which our Comité enjoys at the present moment.'

Von Bissing, however, was not to be led aside from his policy of avoiding any greater concessions than were absolutely necessary.

Von Bissing replies.—In replying to the Comité National on March 12 he said : 'For the purpose of furthering the Comité's humanitarian efforts, which have always had my warmest sympathy, I am prepared to formally repeat the previous declarations made to the Comité in October 1914 and January 1915. According to these, foodstuffs of all kinds imported by the Comité remain exclusively reserved for the civil population of Belgium and must remain free from all military requisitions. In conformity with my declaration of January, I will also repeat that a prohibition has been issued to all armies of the occupied territory under my command from seizing, even against payment, foodstuffs and fodder of any kind which need to be replaced by importations by the Comité.' Von Bissing stopped short at this point however. He could not agree to 'the interpretation that all products derived from the soil are already being imported by you and cannot for that reason be requisitioned ; especially it has not come to my knowledge that oats, straw, hay, potatoes, fresh vegetables and sugar are being imported in such quantities that my prohibition should include these articles.

He refuses to extend Guarantees to cover New Crops.—'If English financial circles demand an extended declaration to the effect that the Imperial General Government shall exempt from requisition all foodstuffs which the country will produce in the future, I regret to say that I cannot give any such declaration. One must abide by the present state of things, according to which the reserves of the foods specified, which existed in the country at the time of my decree of January 21, 1915, are to be reserved for the civil population and cannot be requisitioned for the use of the army even against payment.'

Von Bissing therefore not only refused to give the assurances asked and to grant a general exemption from requisition of native foods, but implied that the exemptions already granted would not apply to any new crops. It therefore became necessary in March to

re-open the negotiations in regard to native foods, in order to provide for the continuance of the relief work after the harvest season. The Belgian harvest in any case would supply the needs of the country for only three months and after that the situation would be as bad or worse than during the first winter.

The Allied Governments demand Guarantees for New Crops in Belgium.—The allied governments had made it an indispensable condition of the continuance of importations of food to Belgium that the Germans would reserve to the civil population all the native foods of the country and would give guarantees not to make any food-requisitions in Belgium. The British Government held unswervingly to this position and maintained that they not only would discontinue their subsidies, but would stop importations unless the harvest of 1915 was reserved in its entirety to the civil population. Mr. Hoover and his associates had therefore hardly finished their negotiations to protect the food-stocks of the country and to secure subsidies from the Allies to purchase foods to make up the deficiency, when it became necessary for them to plunge into a new and even more difficult series of negotiations to protect the crop of 1915, and to secure from the allied governments, in consideration of the guarantees to be negotiated with the Germans, the subsidies needed for the purchase, during the year 1915-16, of the minimum monthly quantities of food called for by the relief program.

#### NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE EXEMPTION OF COMMISSION SUPPLIES FROM CUSTOMS DUTIES

The Germans maintain the Belgian Customs Duties.—Before going on to discuss the organisation of the Commission's work in Northern France, or the negotiations for the protection of the crop of 1915, it is necessary to deal for a moment with a few of the minor negotiations over questions which arose during the first six months of the Commission's activities. The difficulties encountered by the Commission in the matter of customs duties illustrate very well its anomalous character. The German General Government had continued to enforce the whole body of Belgian law, except for the parts that had been superseded by special edicts of the German Government. The Belgian customs tariffs were continued in effect by the General Government and the Belgian customs officers continued at the pre-war posts in their pre-war uniform to collect the pre-war duties on all goods that came to Belgium. The customs service, like all other Belgian services continued in existence by the Germans, was, of course, supervised and controlled by German officers, but the system was maintained intact. When the supplies of the Commission began to come in from Holland, there immediately arose the question of whether the Commission should be required to pay the duties prescribed by Belgian law.

Whitlock extends his Diplomatic Privilege to Commission Supplies.—The shipments were consigned to the American Minister. He, of course, enjoyed the right of exterritoriality and could import anything he pleased 'for his personal use or for the use of his household' duty-free. By extending liberally this privilege and by sending Legation permits for the first shipments to the customs offices at the port of entry on the Belgian-Dutch frontier, the Minister secured the admission of the first shipments to Brussels and the question of customs duty was not raised. The first shipments to Liège were similarly permitted to enter without paying duty.

The case of the 'Brennus.'—Matters did not long remain in this happy condition. The Belgian customs officials were notified by the Germans that they should collect duty on the shipments of flour and other dutiable goods. About December 4 the lighter 'Brennus' with 300 tons of flour for Limbourg Province was held up by the Belgian customs officials, on instructions from the German authorities, at Smeermaes, the frontier station, pending payment of duties. The newly-organised provincial committee at Hasselt notified Brussels of the matter and appealed to the local German Government to permit the 'Brennus' to enter, as it was the understanding that the Germans had promised that the Commission food would come in without the imposition of any duties. The civil governor at Hasselt telegraphed to the civil administration at Brussels for instructions. At the same time Mr. Heinemann took up the matter with the General Government without, however, being able to obtain any satisfaction. On December 7 the chief of the civil administration telegraphed to the German Commissioners at Hasselt: 'Dutiable American food is not exempt from the payment of duties. In case such food, especially flour, has been already shipped in the mistaken idea that it would be exempted from duties, it can be exempted on special grounds, as a matter of courtesy.' At the same time the Comité National was notified that the relief supplies could not be exempted from the ordinary customs duties.

The Commission was not content to let the matter rest, but immediately protested to the Imperial Government at Berlin, through the American Minister, against the imposition of customs duties.

Negotiations with the General Government in Belgium.—Von der Goltz, in his letter to Whitlock on September 17, had specifically declared that 'the Imperial Government agrees not to levy any import-duties on shipments destined for the Belgian population. In the meantime the newly-appointed delegate for Limbourg arrived at Maastricht to find the 'Brennus' still held. Unable to secure her release, either from the local authorities or from the administration at Hasselt, he telegraphed to Rotterdam and to Brussels that the ship was held for payment of the two francs per 100 kilograms of flour fixed by Belgian law. The German authorities at Hasselt had declared that they had not levied this tax, that it was a Belgian tax and was being collected under the Belgian law, by Belgian customs officials, and that consequently the Germans were not violating the promise of von der Goltz, since they had not levied any duties, but merely demanded that the Belgian customs officers should enforce their own law.

On December 12 Whitlock wrote to Baron von der Lancken, who was acting in the capacity of Minister of Foreign Affairs for the General Government in Belgium, asking that the 'Brennus' be admitted immediately without payment of duties and that in the future all Commission cargoes should be similarly exempted from import duties. The following day definite instructions were telegraphed to Hasselt by the General Government to permit the 'Brennus' to enter duty free as a matter of courtesy to the American Minister and the Commission.

Von Bissing exempts Flour from Customs Duties.—The urgent representations of Mr. Heinemann and the Minister induced the Governor-General on December 17 to issue a decree providing that 'foreign flour which is proved to be destined to the Comité National de Secours et d'Alimentation may until further notice be admitted duty free.' This settled the question of duty so far as flour was concerned.

The case of the 'Emanuel.'—Other commodities, such as tinned goods, cloth, sugar and milk were still liable for duties. This became very evident on December 18

when the lighter 'Emmanuel,' also destined for the province of Limbourg, was held at Loozen for the payment of duty on a mixed cargo of flour and sundry supplies. The Belgian authorities at the port of entry had as yet received no instructions that even the flour should be admitted duty free, so they held the 'Emmanuel' for the payment of duties. Kittredge, the delegate for Limbourg, who had fancied the customs matter settled when the 'Brennus' had been admitted on December 13, now found himself in a worse quandary than ever. He went out to the frontier station and learned that the lighter would not be released until the payment of duties, but that such payment would be regarded as a deposit which would be returned if the competent authorities granted exemption to the Commission goods. He accordingly deposited 8,000 francs at Loozen, in order to secure the admission of the lighter and then returned to Hasselt to take up the matter with the German governor there. The Belgian commissioner of customs, who was very anxious to help in every way possible, told him that the cargo was held on orders from the German authorities. The Germans on their part declared that these duties could not be remitted by them; that they had the responsibility of governing the country in the absence of the Belgian Government and that it was their duty to collect the ordinary revenues to defray the expenses of governmental administration. In addition, they said, they had no power to remit the duties, because these were fixed by Belgian law and collected, not by the Germans, but by the Belgian customs services, whose director was still in charge of the customs office at Brussels.

**The Appeal to Berlin.**—The facts of the case were at once reported to the Brussels and Rotterdam offices of the Commission. Whitlock, on December 22, wrote again to the General Government calling their attention to the matter. Captain Lucey in Rotterdam telegraphed to the State Department and to Ambassador Gerard in Berlin, asking them to take action in order to clear up once and for all the question of customs duties. Lighters destined for Ghent, for Antwerp and for Liège were held up about the same time and under the same conditions as in the cases referred to. The matter was therefore causing considerable delay and annoyance in making shipments. As a result of these telegrams the matter got into the press in Holland, England and America, and violent attacks were made on the Germans for exacting import taxes from the Commission. It was declared that the Germans were not sincere in their promises, were trying to profit directly from the importations of the Commission and from the gifts of food made by the charitable world to Belgium, by levying these import duties. There followed a considerable volume of diplomatic correspondence on the matter.

**The Germans admit the extension of Whitlock's Diplomatic Privilege**—Whitlock had at first believed that it was unnecessary to seek any general exemption, as he regarded the certificates of ex-territoriality which he could issue for each shipment as sufficient to secure the entry of the relief supplies without payment of duty. The Germans, however, seemed to have doubted the justification of this unprecedented extension of the diplomatic immunity. The household requirements of the Minister could hardly by any stretch of imagination be considered to amount to 80,000 tons of food a month. The Germans showed little disposition to exercise their imagination sufficiently to regard the whole of the Belgian population as forming part of the household of the American Minister. While they did not directly refuse to Whitlock the right of extending his diplomatic immunity to the Commission's shipments, they did hold up the lighters until the hue and cry in the press brought a tip from Berlin that the General Government had better develop an imagination. The Belgian Director of Customs, Monsieur J. Janssens, was therefore permitted to reply

favourably to Mr. Whitlock, and on December 24 he notified Whitlock that the necessary instructions had been given to the customs collectors to permit the cargoes of the Commission to come in duty free and to repay any sums that had already been collected from the Commission.

**More Difficulties and Negotiations.**—The German authorities in the Limbourg, however, interpreted this order to mean that only flour was exempt from payment, and accordingly in repaying to Kittredge the money he had deposited held back 2,000 francs to cover duty on tinned goods and cloth that had been in the cargo. When news of this was transmitted to Brussels and Rotterdam the weary round of negotiations began again. Minister van Dyke, writing from The Hague to the State Department on December 29, said that he had learned that the German civil authorities in Limbourg had collected a heavy import tax on shipments made to that province. Van Dyke said also that on being informed by the Rotterdam office of the Commission that this information was exact, he had instructed the manager of the Rotterdam office to discontinue all shipments to Limbourg until the tax was removed and a promise made by the German civil government to refund the money hitherto exacted. Van Dyke at the same time sent a copy of this letter to Gerard in Berlin.

**The Intervention of the Imperial Government.**—It would be useless to give in detail the correspondence that followed. On receiving van Dyke's letter, Gerard took up the matter with the Imperial Foreign Office with request for immediate action. Immediately upon receiving van Dyke's letter, Bryan, the Secretary of State, cabled Gerard asking him to investigate at once the truth of the charge that the Germans were levying import duties in Limbourg.\* Gerard replied that the tax had been removed and the amounts collected refunded. In the meantime the Belgian Director of Customs had, on December 31, assured the American Minister 'that in conformity with regulations covering diplomatic immunities, the shipments in question will be admitted duty free . . . and the delivery will be attended with no difficulty or delay due to the customs authorities.' The Imperial Government in Berlin, in response to Gerard's representations, had immediately wired new instructions to Belgium. On calling one day on the civil governor in Hasselt, the American delegate was considerably astonished to find this German greatly annoyed. He soon learned what a hornet's nest he had stirred up. After some preliminary remarks the governor turned to the young American and said fiercely: 'Why do you go to these diplomats to settle these troubles, why don't you come to me directly? It makes me so much trouble to have these people messing in affairs.' Then he pointed to a telegram signed Bethmann Hollweg. 'I have just been reprimanded,' he said, 'by the Imperial Chancellor for collecting customs duty from you and have been ordered to stop such collections in the future and to refund all money already paid.' Thereafter there was but little trouble in the matter of customs duties, though the matter occasionally came up. On January 19, 1915, Dr. von Sandt, chief of the German civil administration, wrote the Commission at Brussels that supplies of all sorts would henceforth be admitted without the payment of customs duties. Although no German decree was ever issued to exempt the other articles than flour, the matter was simply disregarded and the Commission never paid a penny in customs duties.

**The Customs Question appears again in 1916.**—In January 1916 the Germans

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\* Bryan to Gerard, January 13, 1915.

seemed suddenly to have discovered the irregularity of the arrangements as to customs duties. On the 29th of that month, Baron von der Lancken, at the request of the Governor-General, drew up a memorandum to explain to that gentleman how it happened that the Commission was paying no duties. The question had arisen on January 23, when the case was referred to the civil administration, of three lighters containing soap, sugar and milk, for which special certificates had been delivered by Whitlock. Until September 1915 all cargoes had been consigned to the Minister and were therefore admitted duty free under the cover of his diplomatic immunity. After that time, however, all cargoes were consigned simply to the Commission for Relief in Belgium and the lighters continued to come in without payment of duty. The certificate of the Commission was considered sufficient warrant to exempt them. The chief of the civil administration, Dr. von Sandt, in commenting on the situation in a letter to the customs department of the General Government on February 9, 1916, said: 'The American Minister at Brussels has for a considerable time been receiving, by virtue of his diplomatic exemption, considerable quantities of commodities liable for the payment of duty or included in the list of articles whose importation is prohibited; a collection of duty on these commodities, in accordance with the tariff now in force, would have produced considerable sums.

'Judging by the nature, as well as by the quantity of these merchandise, it cannot be admitted that the legal presumption in favour of its duty-free entrance as the property of the Legation exist under these circumstances; instead, there is reason to believe that these commodities have been imported to the fictitious address of the American Minister for the Commission for Relief and the Comité National. It follows that with the exception of flour destined for the Comité National, all this merchandise should have been liable to the duty or excluded in the case of those articles whose importation is forbidden.'

**New Attempt to Collect Duties.**—At the conclusion of this investigation the Governor-General apparently decided that in the future the Commission would be required to pay the tariff on all dutiable goods imported by it, other than flour, which had been exempted by order of the Governor-General. Dr. Bruhn, of the political department of the General Government, wrote on March 17, 1916, to Mr. Poland, Director of the Commission at Brussels: 'It is true that this merchandise is addressed to the American Minister, but it seems likely that it is intended for the Commission for Relief. For this reason Mr. Brand Whitlock hesitates to import these goods duty-free on his own name as diplomatic merchandise. I request you therefore to inform me whether this merchandise is really intended for the C.R.B., and I take the liberty of stating in this connection that, according to the decree issued by the Governor-General that the Commission is only allowed exemption from duty in the case of imported flour, whereas the importation of all other merchandise is subject to the tariff now in effect, and the charges provided for in the tariffs must be imposed in the case of this merchandise.' The Commission and the Patron Ministers protested against the collecting of any import duties from the Commission and emphasised the point made in the beginning, that the work of the Commission would be greatly endangered if it were required to pay duties. The Governor-General, under pressure, recognised the advisability of permitting the Commission to continue to import its goods duty free.

**The Germans finally concede Exemption from Customs.**—The matter was settled by an order sent out at the end of March 1916 by the German civil administration to the Belgian customs service that no duties were to be collected from the Commission,

because His Excellency the Baron von der Goltz in November 1914 had recognised the right of the American Minister to receive duty free the merchandise necessary to the poor population of Belgium.

It is curious to note that in thus finally yielding the point, dictated not by any legal consideration but by recognition that the political situation made such concession necessary, the Germans, to justify their concession to their own sense of logical consistency, had finally to hunt up a forgotten conversation of a dead Governor-General to make their act seem something else than the surrender it was.

#### NEGOTIATIONS TO SECURE PASSPORTS AND LIBERTY OF ACTION FOR AMERICAN DELEGATES

**The Necessity for Liberty of Action.**—Another of the difficult questions which came up during the first winter's work was that of the privileges to be enjoyed by the representatives of the Commission in Belgium. It was one of the essential conditions imposed by the British Government that the representatives of the Commission in Belgium should be sufficiently numerous and should have sufficient liberty of action to guarantee that the food distribution should be effectively controlled and the Germans held to a rigid observance of their guarantees. The Commission could not discharge its obligations in Belgium without an adequate force of Americans to act as delegates in the provinces in close touch with the details of the work. These delegates could accomplish nothing without automobiles to carry them about their districts and passports permitting them to use the automobiles. It was necessary, in order to assure the success of the work, that the Commission representatives should enjoy complete liberty of movement and of action, and as great facilities of communication as were possible.

**The attitude of the German Military.**—The Germans naturally looked with no great favour on the idea of having a considerable number of Americans travelling about freely in a conquered territory so close to the theatre of military operations. The Commission, with its delegates in every province, was more than once suspected, at least by minor officials, of being a great espionage machine. Consequently the tendency of the officials in Belgium was to restrict passports as much as possible, and to limit the activities of the delegates as much as they could without actually endangering the continuance of food imports by exasperating the Commission beyond the bounds of endurance. It was undoubtedly galling to the Germans, who regarded themselves as absolute masters of the country, to see Americans, who were not in the least afraid of them and who were beyond their control, dashing about the country in automobiles. Governor-General von Bissing is said to have remarked to the American Minister a few months after the beginning of the Commission's work that he wondered why these young men of the Commission were running up and down the country in motor-cars. It made him wonder sometimes, he said, who was really ruling Belgium, the German army or these young delegates. Politically also the idea was distasteful to the Germans. The Americans were enthusiastically received by the Belgian population, saluted and cheered as they passed by in their machines. It gave to the people a sense of security, made them feel that they were not without protection against the Germans. The Belgian people indeed had a pathetic confidence in the power and readiness of the Americans to restrain the Germans. The Americans were everywhere



cordially received and entertained. The Germans soon became aware of this feeling among the people and regarded it as very dangerous. It was the duty of the Belgian people to be submissive and the activity of the American Commission tended to stimulate their opposition, therefore the local authorities in Belgium lost no opportunity to restrain the activity of the American delegates and to make life as uncomfortable as possible for them.

**Berlin promises the Necessary Passports.**—The Imperial German Foreign Office on December 11, 1914, gave Ambassador Gerard the assurance that all passports desired by the representatives of the Commission in Belgium and needed by them in their work would be issued through an arrangement between the competent passport authorities in Belgium and the Commission. The general orders that had been sent out in November instructing local officials to facilitate the work of the Commission resulted at first in great liberality in the issuance of passports. In the various provinces the delegates found the provincial governments very well disposed at first and ready to grant nearly all passports asked for.

**Difficulties in obtaining Passports at Brussels.**—It was at first more difficult to obtain passes from the central pass-bureau in Brussels than in the provinces, although for the first month or two the American delegates all received general passes for the whole of the 'occupied' area in Belgium. In a few weeks, however, the Germans in Brussels, dismayed by the sight of some fifty Americans travelling about the country, began to make it more and more difficult to obtain passes. Sometimes weeks would pass after an application was made before the pass would be issued. This delay occasioned much annoyance and inconvenience to the Commission. Heinemann intervened, but the authorities paid but scant attention either to his requests or to those of the American Minister. The various provincial delegates were not particularly affected at first, because of the ease with which they could obtain passes in the provinces.

**Hoover's Representations at Berlin.**—The difficulties at Brussels, however, became so great that Hoover, when in Berlin in the early part of February 1915, made special representations to the Imperial Government in the matter and received the assurance that all necessary passports would be granted immediately upon application made by the Commission and endorsed by the American Minister. Hoover complained bitterly that although the Commission was in Belgium at the request and with the approval of the German Government, its delegates were made to feel that a favour was being conferred on them when they were permitted to remain in Belgium at all. Hoover declared also that it was necessary that the whole attitude of the General Government should be revised; that the Commission understood the character of its obligation and were prepared to carry it out to the letter; the delegates of the Commission were under the strictest obligation of neutrality, in word and in action, and these pledges would be strictly adhered to.

**Negotiations with the General Government in Brussels.**—When Hoover arrived in Brussels, about February 10, he found that the attitude of the General Government was more disquieting than ever. In interviews with officials of the civil administration and with von Bissing himself, Hoover pointed out the necessity for a greater consideration of the needs of the Commission by the General Government in the matter of passports. He found scant comfort, however, in the attitude of von Bissing and his assistants. The Governor-General told Hoover rather angrily that the Commission members already had too much liberty; that they were running to and fro all over the country to the considerable consternation of the military authorities; and that the Commission must at once

re-arrange its business so as to reduce the demands for passports since the General Government proposed to still further limit the movements of the Commission's delegates. 'The Commission,' he said, 'only need a few men in the central warehouses, who should remain in these warehouses and not move about the country; the Belgians could attend to all the work of food distribution.' Hoover tried to point out the international position of the Commission, its diplomatic responsibility and the urgent necessity of letting delegates move freely about the country to inspect constantly the whole work of relief and to look after the speedy forwarding of shipments. The Governor-General showed no disposition of listening to Hoover, nor to attempt to understand his position, so Hoover resolved that, as further discussion was useless, he would send a memorandum to the Governor-General setting forth the Commission's attitude in the matter of passports.

Hoover's Memorandum to von Bissing.—In an interview with Von der Lancken on February 12, Hoover presented the memorandum and explained how vital the question of passports was to the work of the Commission; that without adequate freedom of movement the whole structure of relief might fail. Von der Lancken recognised the importance of the matter and promised to take it up personally with the Governor-General. In the memorandum Hoover pointed out that the English Government had consented to the imports only under the strongest pressure and then only on condition that the Commission's representatives should have sufficient liberty of movement in Belgium to be able to control the distribution of all food sent in. Hoover declared that the passports issued to the Commission had in no case been misused; that the men in Belgium were of the highest character and fullest confidence. 'They are gentlemen who would scorn the imputation of espionage or other improper conduct on their part. It is hopeless for us to induce these men to remain or to secure new men if they are to be made subject to the whims of every local commander, and on the other hand we cannot take the responsibility of giving the necessary assurances to the American public who subscribe so generously and to the interested governments unless we have men of this character and unless we are able to carry on our daily work of supervision, inspection and accounting with the necessary freedom of movement. I am compelled to assure your Excellency that unless we can establish a basis of confidential and friendly relations and trust with the German authorities we shall be compelled to withdraw, and the flow of the stream of foodstuffs into Belgium from outside countries must necessarily cease.'

Von Bissing replies imposing Limitations on the Commission.—Hoover returned to London before a reply was received to this communication. Officials of the General Government conferred with Heinemann about the desires of the Commission in the matter of passports, but Heinemann was no longer actively engaged in the work of the Commission and not in a position to know its passport needs. The result was that von Bissing, while apparently trying to carry out instructions from Berlin to accede to the Commission's demands in the matter of passports, yet limited the granting of passports in a way quite unsatisfactory to the Commission. In his letter of February 20 to Heinemann, von Bissing stated that he shared Hoover's conviction of the great importance and difficulties of the undertaking of the Commission and recognised that a firm basis of confidence, of friendly and harmonious co-operation between the German authorities and the Commission was necessary. He gave the assurance that 'I shall in future as in the past gladly aid you in your humanitarian work and praiseworthy activities.' As a result of the conferences of his staff with Heinemann he had decided the conditions under which passports would be

issued to members of the Commission. He laid down certain general conditions: the number of delegates was to be restricted as much as possible and would be reduced to twenty-five after April 1; the frequent changes in personnel should as far as possible be discontinued; donors should be admitted only under exceptional conditions. The Americans, he said, should limit themselves to controlling the distribution of the supplies, which was actively to be carried on by the Belgian committees. He specified that in the future delegates should have passes only to travel in their own province and to Brussels; that four members of the Brussels office should have passes for the whole territory of the General Government and that six passes should be granted to Holland each month.

**The Commission Appeals to Berlin.**—This letter created considerable dismay and indignation among the members of the Commission. It was hardly possible to carry on the work with only twenty-five men and the Commission could not in any case recognise the right of the German Government to fix the number of the delegates or to define their functions. Hoover, therefore, when he learned of the matter, telegraphed on March 9 to Ambassador Gerard protesting against von Bissing's decision: 'We have been notified to reduce our staff in Belgium to twenty-five men by the early part of April and passes to these men will be issued only under great restrictions. We are entirely discouraged by this attitude of the local authorities. We do not believe that it can be in line with the intentions of the Imperial German Government toward us and trust you will take it up with them. The fundamental fact is that in order for us to give proper executive control to the distribution of this foodstuff and to give credulity to our assurances to the allied governments as to the guarantees, it is absolutely necessary for us to have the right to at least fifty people, to put any such number of staff into Belgium as may be reasonable to meet our own emergencies.' Hoover, in writing to Whitlock on March 18, spoke of the danger to the Commission from the indignation which would be aroused in England if the attitude of von Bissing in the pass question should be known.

**Hoover to Whitlock on Passport Difficulties.**—He pointed out that the military element in the United Kingdom were opposed to the Commission's work and were looking hard for a justifiable excuse to stop it. 'He had contrived,' he said, 'to stem the tide by agreeing to protest through Gerard. Whether the actual protest does any good or not from a Belgian point of view, it has got me out of a bad hole here. . . . Between the two evils, the risk of the Germans stopping our work in Belgium is much less than that of the Allies stopping the food supply.' At Mr. Hoover's request, Whitlock made new representations to the Governor-General in the matter of passports. He explained that Mr. Hoover was facing great difficulties because of the opposition of a strong party in Great Britain to the work of the Commission, and that Mr. Hoover had had no desire to override the decision of the authorities in Belgium in making his appeal to Gerard.

**Von Bissing makes Concessions.**—The Foreign Office in Berlin, at Gerard's request, communicated the Commission's demand to von Bissing with a request for information as to the action of the General Government. Von Bissing, replying on March 21, said that the difficulties were due entirely to mutual misunderstandings; that in regard to the number of delegates, 'Mr. Heinemann has himself admitted the justice of my request that the number of gentlemen in the service of the Commission be reduced as far as possible and definitely proposed to carry out this reduction as reflecting his own wish in the matter. . . . If, contrary to these appearances, the Commission now considers that an extension of the number is essential, I will, to oblige, raise no objections to the employ-

ment by the Commission in Belgium of about ten additional persons after April 15. I must, however, energetically protest against the claim that I had perhaps reduced the number of members in order to make the control more difficult. The assurances of freedom from requisitions given by my predecessor and myself are and will be most exactly and faithfully observed by me and in this respect supervision by the American members is not at all necessary. The demand of Mr. Hoover that the Commission be permitted to determine alone on its own judgment the number of American members serving in Belgium cannot be granted. On the contrary, the figure must be fixed according to the needs of the case, to be investigated by me as well.'

The German attitude toward the Commission's Activities.—In this expression, von Bissing put forward a point of view very characteristic of the attitude nearly always taken by the German military authorities. It was exceedingly humiliating to them to feel that they, the rulers of an occupied territory, should have to have the observance of their promises watched over by an agency from outside, whose activities they were often inclined to regard with jealousy and suspicion. To the German military commander any order of the German army command was as definite and as exactly executed as the will of God. The military authorities declared that they had granted guarantees as to the immunity of requisition of certain supplies; that no German soldier would ever think of violating these guarantees more than he would any other military order; and that if violations occurred it was a matter to be investigated and dealt with by the military authorities alone, in the same way as in the case of infraction of other orders. So to them any inspection by the American representatives of the Commission to determine whether these orders were observed was a quite unnecessary and even impertinent intrusion into military matters of a purely domestic nature in which no interference could be admitted nor tolerated. But neither the Commission nor the allied governments could agree with this point of view and Hoover had constantly in his dealings with the Germans to emphasise the necessity of the measures he proposed in view of the diplomatic position of the Commission. He assured the Germans repeatedly that the Commission would live up to its promises to maintain neutrality and on the whole the success of the Commission and its American representatives in Belgium was truly remarkable. They played their difficult rôle with the tact and forbearance which the situation demanded and ultimately won the confidence of nearly all the authorities with whom they came in contact. The German officials slowly came to the recognition that the Americans were 'playing the game'; that they had only one object in Belgium, to feed the civil population. It took time to establish this position, but the consistent record of the two hundred Americans who served in Belgium in the two and a half years of its activities ultimately proved even to the Germans that the Americans were faithfully living up to the pledge they had given to their chief and which he in turn had given to the German authorities.

The Commission's Passport Department.—The question of passports was occasionally raised later, but the principle remained the same as that fixed upon in March 1915. The Commission soon arranged to make its application for passports directly to the General Government and soon the passport section of the Commission was burdened with the task also of securing passports for the members of the Comité National and the provincial committees.

Senor Germàn Bulle was in charge of the passport affairs in the office at Brussels. He was, before the war, Mexican Charge d'Affaires at Brussels and was connected with

the Commission practically from its beginning. He acted as a special diplomatic secretary and represented the Commission in many capacities in its relations with the German Government.

**The Work of Senor Bulle.**—Senor Bulle rendered most invaluable services to the Commission in this position. He had a wide acquaintance among the Germans and could approach them with greater effectiveness than any other member of the Commission. Tactful, absolutely devoted to the work of the Commission, he was one of its most invaluable members. He was liked and respected by all of the successive groups of delegates for his genial kindness and helpful friendship. His death at the end of December 1916 was a great loss to the Commission and a personal shock to all its many members who had known and respected him. For two years he had been constantly occupied with the affairs of the Commission. To any American who had been in Belgium during this time, Senor Bulle had seemed one of the mainstays of the organisation.

## CHAPTER VI

THE EXTENSION OF THE COMMISSION'S WORK TO  
BELGIAN ETAPE AND TO THE NORTH OF FRANCE

## THE RELIEF WORK IN THE ETAPPEN REGION

The Belgian Etappen Regions.—The part of Belgium occupied by the German armies was roughly divided into two areas. The largest and most important was the so-called district of occupation (Okkupation-Gebiet). This included the whole of the provinces of Belgium under the rule of the Governor-General in Brussels. All of the measures of relief work described thus far have related to this area. The second part of Belgium was that included within the districts of the etappen and of actual military operations. At the end of 1914 the etappen region included East and West Flanders and the western part of the Hainaut about Tournai. Later on this line was modified several times, Tournai being first, in the spring of 1915, put into occupation district under the Governor-General, and again included in the etappen in August 1916. The districts about Mons, and the southern part of the province of Luxembourg, were also included in the etappen in December 1916. The guarantees for the protection of the relief in the district of occupation did not apply to these etappen areas, which were not under the rule of the Governor-General, but were under the immediate jurisdiction of the commander of the army operating in each district. The Governor-General at Brussels therefore had no authority to give any guarantees for these regions, and before the relief work could be extended, additional guarantees had to be obtained from the various armies.

From the very first the Commission and the Comité National drew up their plans in the belief that the Belgian etappen areas would be given aid in the same way as the other parts of Belgium. Some of the first shipments sent in from Rotterdam were directed to Ghent and distributed there and in Bruges and Ostend. As a result of representations by the Comité National and by the General Government, the necessary guarantees to protect the relief work were soon obtained from the army command at Ghent.

The military conditions made it necessary to work out different methods of controlling distributions than those which prevailed in the district ruled by the Governor-General. In the etappen regions practically no communication was allowed from one commune to another. No post was in operation. Committee meetings were seldom tolerated. American delegates were never allowed to ride freely about the country in their automobiles, but could only leave their place of residence when accompanied by a German officer.

The German Guarantees for the Etappen Regions.—After some preliminary negotiations the army command in the Flanders expressed its willingness that the relief work should be extended to the Flanders. On December 6, 1914, an order was sent out providing for the work of relief. This stated that 'a committee has been organised which will import English and American breadstuffs for the Belgian population. The chief

commands are to secure declarations from the communes located in the districts of operations regarding the need for breadstuffs as calculated for definite periods. These declarations are to be sent directly to the army inspection of the *etappen*, which will forward them to the committee. It must absolutely be avoided having any of the breadstuffs thus supplied to the communes taken by the troops, because England has declared her willingness to permit the importation of grain only under the condition that none of these shall be used for the provisioning of German troops.'

This order was supplemented by further instructions sent out on December 16, 1914. In these instructions it was stated that the chief of the civil administration at Brussels had appealed to the General Government to give as much aid as possible to the communes of East and West Flanders which had suffered in the war. The order of December 6 was confirmed, and the commanders in the *etappen* region were instructed to see that declarations were sent from the communes in the *etappen* region, stating the food required, of the same character as those which had been provided for in the district of operations by the previous order. The army inspection would forward all these declarations and requests to the chief of the civil administration at Brussels for delivery to the *Comité National*. 'It is left to the representative of this committee in Ghent to come to a direct understanding in each case with the inspection of *etappen* concerning the further forwarding to the communes of the foodstuffs and relief articles sent by the committee in Brussels to the warehouses in Ghent. The inspection will regulate, through the intermediary of the administration of the Belgian railways, this transportation, in the same manner as the transportation of coal.'

Von Sandt, in transmitting these orders of December 6 and 16, 1914, to the *Comité National* on December 19, declared that 'it results therefrom that the breadstuffs of the *Comité* are protected in the operation zone and the *etappen* zone and that the work of the *Comité* will be fully protected by the authorities there.'

This assurance was further supplemented in a letter of von Sandt under date of February 11, 1915, in which he said: 'The competent military authority informs us that for East Flanders and the northern part of West Flanders it has issued orders that the supplies of flour and breadstuffs, as well as pharmaceutical articles, imported by the committee, may in no case be requisitioned by the troops.' In a letter of February 17, von Sandt reported to the *Comité National* that this protection from requisition in the Flanders had also been extended to cover fodder, that is, maize and oil-cakes, and all similar materials, imported by the *Comité*.

**Relief operations in the Flanders.**—The *Comité National* therefore included the Flanders in its program of relief on the same basis as in the case of the other Belgian provinces. Provincial committees were organized for both East and West Flanders and these were permitted by the Germans to meet under definite restrictions. The committees were permitted also to send representatives, usually under military escort, to attend the weekly meetings of the *Comité National*. In this way, therefore, in spite of the difference in the military regime in the occupation district and in the *etappen* district, the work of relief in Flanders was organized in much the same way as in the area of the General Government. The General Government at Brussels worked in close harmony with the command of the Flanders army and but few difficulties arose, at least during the opening months of the relief work. The guarantees given by von Bissing, protecting Belgian goods from requisition, if they would have to be replaced by importations, did not apply, however,

to the Flanders. Here the German army reserved and used the right to take for itself the Belgian native products. The grain and potato crops in the Flanders formed a very considerable proportion of the Belgian harvest, and this was to lead to considerable difficulty later on, because of the objection of the allied governments to the German requisitions of food in Flanders. At the same time that negotiations were opened up for the protection of the new harvest in the district of the General Government, similar negotiations were undertaken to secure some sort of protection for the Flanders crop. These will be discussed in the next chapter.

The Commission was fortunate in being able to secure as its delegate for Flanders Mr. J. A. Van Hee, who had been before the war American Vice-Consul at Ghent. Mr. Van Hee possessed a thorough knowledge of the Flanders and enjoyed the confidence of the German authorities there. He was therefore able to represent the Commission effectively in the *etappen* region and, in spite of the difficulty of communication, the work of relief was under way in the Flanders almost as soon as in the other parts of Belgium. The regulations drawn up for the area of the General Government, relating to the manner of food distribution, the control of mills and bakers, the fixing of rations and the prices of food, were also applied in the Flanders. In a general way, therefore, one can consider the relief work in these areas as being an integral part of the work of the Comité National, and in later references to this Belgian *etappen* region it will be treated in connection with the general work of the Comité National.

#### THE EXTENSION OF THE RELIEF WORK TO FRENCH REGIONS WITHIN THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT

**The French Regions in the territory of the General Government.**—The Germans, in setting up a General Government at Brussels, ruled the country by a civil rather than a military government. Certain French areas were included, for administrative purposes, within the jurisdiction of the General Government at Brussels. These were the regions about Maubeuge, with some 110,000 population, and the French part of the Meuse Valley from Fumay to Givet, which extends into Belgium and which had a population of about 20,000. As originally planned, the relief operations were only to be extended to Belgian populations. These French areas, however, because they were included in the area of the General Government, were thereby automatically cut off from all communication with the French *etappen* regions to the south and west. The food shortage, in the industrial region of Maubeuge especially, soon became as critical as in the industrial parts of Belgium. The people of these French districts appealed immediately to the American Minister at Brussels and to the Comité National for aid. The Comité National, on November 24, 1914, decided to include Maubeuge in its program of relief. At this time, however, the Comité National expressly declared that this was to be considered as an exception and not as a precedent, since the Comité National could not, with its limited financial resources, undertake the provisionment of any large sections of the French population behind the German lines.

**Maubeuge.**—The Maubeuge area was for relief purposes attached to Western Hainaut and made part of the territory under the jurisdiction of the Mons committee. It was treated exactly as if it were a Belgian area. Delegates were chosen from Maubeuge to act as members of the Mons provincial committee. The food for Maubeuge came from



Mons and the financial responsibility rested on the Hainaut committee, which had to secure repayment from Maubeuge. The American delegates for the province of Hainaut were permitted to go freely into the Maubeuge district to inspect the operations of the relief work. Maubeuge, as part of the area of the General Government, was subject to the same rules as to passports and regulations as applied to the Belgian districts of the General Government, and there was therefore no difficulty in the matter of the protection of food-stuffs.\*

The guarantees that had been given in October and November had referred only to the Belgian territory of the General Government. The Comité National and the American Minister therefore took up at once with the General Government the matter of having the Governor-General's guarantees extended so as to include the region of Maubeuge. Von Sandt, replying on January 14, 1915, to Whitlock's letter of December 18, 1914, declared that the Governor-General had decided that his edict of November 14, 1914, protecting importations from requisition, should apply also to all relief supplies sent to Maubeuge.

**The Givet-Fumay Region.**—In the early part of December the chief of the civil administration referred to Mr. Heinemann and the Comité National requests from the population of the Givet-Fumay region that they also be included within the area to be provisioned by the Comité National. In a meeting of the Comité National on December 10, Baron d'Huart, President of the Provincial Committee of Namur, reported that he had received many demands from the people of the Givet-Fumay region for food, and asked if the committee of Namur could intervene and aid this population. He was informed, however, that as the Comité National had been authorised to import food only for the Belgian population, it could not further extend aid to French regions. Francqui emphasised the fact that the extension of the work to Maubeuge had been made as a distinct exception and that he could not further extend the work of the Comité National without new authorisations. At the meeting of the executive committee on December 15 the question was brought up again. The representatives of the Rockefeller Foundation had visited the Givet-Fumay region and had brought back distressing reports of food shortage there. Francqui, however, thought the Comité National could not intervene, and suggested that the whole of the feeding of the French population behind the German lines should be taken up with the President of the French Republic. This did not settle matters, however, for, at the meeting of the executive committee the week following, on December 22, several members gave reports as to the unhappy state of the people of the Givet-Fumay region. They insisted that the Comité National should take over the provisionment of these people, if for no other reason than that here, as in the region of Maubeuge, a considerable proportion of the population was of Belgian nationality. The comité exécutif decided therefore that the question would be again submitted to the Comité National, to obtain its consent for making this new exception in favour of feeding the people of the Givet-Fumay area, which could, for administrative purposes, be easily annexed to the province of Namur. The Comité National, at its meeting of December 31, decided to make this extension of its work and asked the provincial committee of Namur to undertake the feeding of this new region with its 20,000 people, without, however, making any sort of engagement as to the continuation of the relief so granted. At the same time it was provided that the charitable

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\* The region of Maubeuge was taken out of the General Government in December 1916, and thereafter was provisioned as part of the district of St. Quentin.

funds of the provincial committee of Hainaut and Namur could be used to relieve distress in these French regions of Maubeuge and Givet-Fumay. A separate account was, however, to be kept of all amounts disbursed in these areas. To permit the Namur committee to feed this new region, its percentage of foodstuffs was raised from four to five per cent. of the total imported.

**First shipments to the Givet-Fumay Region.**—In the first week in January, therefore, the Namur committee despatched thirty tons of flour to Givet and Fumay in a special train of three cars that had been arranged by the Germans. Bowden, the irrepressible American delegate at Namur, went ahead of the train in his overland car, made arrangements for storing the goods and instructed the local committees as to the methods of distribution. He established one *dépôt* at Givet and another at Fumay and arranged with the committees for the payment of the value of the goods delivered to the Namur committee. Delegates from the Givet-Fumay region were added to the Namur provincial committee, and thereafter this region was considered as an integral part of the province of Namur for purposes of provisionment. Just as in the case of the Maubeuge area, a special guarantee against requisitions was immediately requested. This was at once given. Dr. Kaufmann of the Civil Administration, writing on January 21, stated that the Governor-General had decided to extend his earlier guarantees to cover all supplies sent to the region of Givet-Fumay.

By the middle of January the relief organisations had thus extended their activities from the area of the General Government in Belgium to the Belgian *etappen* districts and also to the two French districts included within the jurisdiction of the Governor-General. They were thus brought into touch immediately with conditions very different from those prevailing in the 'occupied' part of Belgium, and were also brought, by the extension of their work into parts of France, into touch with the distressing conditions prevailing in the French *etappen* areas. It very soon became apparent that hundreds of thousands of people would perish miserably in France, unless the Commission could find some means of providing them also with food, and even as early as December the Commission had begun to consider plans for extending its work in such a way as to feed the whole of the French population of the invaded regions.

#### THE APPEAL FOR AID FROM THE OCCUPIED PORTION OF NORTHERN FRANCE

**Conditions in 'Occupied' France.** Living behind the German lines in Northern France were some 2,150,000 French whose situation was even more desperate and precarious than that of the Belgian population. Unlike the people of the greater part of Belgium, this population were living under an absolute military regime. They enjoyed no liberty of movement and were practically prisoners within their own communes. More than half of the total population was included in the three contiguous *arrondissements* of Lille, Valenciennes and Douai, in the Department de Nord. The industrial population of this area was very dense, and had always depended for its sustenance on the importation of food. Consequently food supplies very rapidly disappeared, and the cutting off of all imports soon brought the population into an even more desperate situation than that of the Belgian population before the beginning of the relief work. Steps had of course been taken by local authorities, immediately after the occupation, to provide for some sort of

food distribution to the poor and to the unemployed. The various town councils and local committees succeeded in obtaining a portion of the 1914 harvest, and were also able to obtain a part of the considerable stock of cattle and sheep from the agricultural regions. Resources were secured by the issuance of 'bons de ville' (communal notes) and by borrowing from the wealthier citizens; but, just as in the case of Belgium, local organisations, no matter how efficient, could not long relieve the suffering of the population when there was no food available and when the local stocks were rapidly becoming exhausted. It is indeed surprising that the regions of the North of France were able to maintain themselves for as long as they did without external aid.

**First appeals to the Commission and the Comité National.**—As soon as the news of the work of the Commission for Relief in Belgium came to the officials and committees in Northern France, they began to appeal to it to extend its activities into Northern France. In the month of December 1914, delegations were permitted by the Germans to go from Lille and Valenciennes to Brussels, to ask aid of the neutral Ministers, the Commission and the Comité National. M. Dreyfus, the sub-prefect of Valenciennes, M. Guerin, member of the Chamber of Commerce at Lille, were in Brussels in December, at the time that Hoover was paying his second visit to Belgium, and they described the situation in their districts to Hoover as well as to the Comité National. The Comité National explained to this French delegation the difficulties which for the time being prevented the Comité National from coming to their aid. They were told that the Comité National had authorisation from the allied governments to import food only for the Belgian population and, furthermore, that its resources abroad were barely sufficient to enable it to pay for the monthly importations needed to provide a minimum ration for the Belgian population. Francoqui suggested that the relief work in Northern France might be organised in the same way as the work in Belgium had been organised; that it would be first necessary to secure from the German general headquarters a guarantee that all imported food would be reserved exclusively to the French population; that having obtained this, it would next be necessary to secure from the allied governments the authorisation to make shipments, and, finally, when this authorisation was obtained, it would be necessary to find some means of securing sufficient financial resources abroad to provide for the payment of the food to be purchased. Francoqui assured them that, if these preliminaries could be arranged, the Comité National would be very glad to give every assistance in its power in the transportation and distribution of supplies. Mr. Hoover, when talking to the French delegations, advised them that he would be very glad indeed if he could help them, but that he was already overburdened with the difficulties of securing food for Belgium and thought he could do nothing for Northern France unless the French Government itself would intervene and provide the political and financial assistance necessary to make possible any extensive program of relief in the occupied French areas.

The French delegates returned to their territory with this not very reassuring report. They set to work to make an appeal to the French Government to come to the aid of the inhabitants of the occupied territories. At the same time they applied to the German army command for permission to send a delegate to Paris to press their petition.

**New appeals from Occupied France.**—New appeals for assistance kept coming continually from the occupied territories, each appeal more desperate than the preceding one. At the end of December the Bishop of Lille addressed to Minister Whitlock a petition in which the rapidly growing distress in the City of Lille was graphically described. The

American Consul at Roubaix transmitted to Ambassador Gerard at Berlin a report of the food situation, and said that the civil population of Roubaix, Lille, Tourcoing and the surrounding cities were in great need of flour and that the authorities had offered to pay for all supplies on delivery. The consul stated that a thousand sacks of flour per day were needed for the three cities mentioned, and suggested that an arrangement be made with the German and British Governments to permit the importation. He transmitted a letter from the Mayor of Roubaix stating that 250,000 persons would be starving in a few days in those cities.

**Ambassador Gerard's intervention.**—The German Foreign Office assured Ambassador Gerard that the military authorities would give every facility for the importation of food. Gerard transmitted this information to the Department of State, asking for instructions. The Department of State replied: 'That the British Government raised no objection to the importation of foodstuffs in Belgium under the auspices and guarantee of the Commission for Relief in Belgium; that their attitude was the same as to foodstuffs for France; and that the question, how far it is desirable that the Commission should extend its activities to districts in France now in German occupation, seemed to be one primarily for submission to the French Government. In any case, the Commission would have to satisfy itself whether it would be permitted by the German authorities to form an adequate organisation in districts so close to war operations. If it was desired to establish a system of distribution distinct from the work of the Commission, this proposal would equally appear to be one for submission to the French Government.'\*

**The Commission and the problem of French Relief.**—Hoover, in replying to Gerard, stated that the Commission had received repeated requests to extend its work to Northern France, but they felt, he said, 'that it is up to the French Government to support their own people. We are not averse to undertaking the extra labour entailed in finding the foodstuffs and transporting them through Belgium into this section provided, of course, the Germans agree; but we do feel that, as our labour is voluntary, the least response which the French Government could give for such service from all our people would be that they should make a substantial subscription to our funds.' †

At that time Hoover was too much occupied with other negotiations to be able to undertake immediately measures for the extension of the work to Northern France. He decided to wait until he had made his projected visit to Berlin before taking up the matter officially with the French Government. He wanted first to be sure of the attitude of the Imperial Government.

**A Mercenary Proposal and its Reception.**—At the end of January he received a visit from the former American Consul at Lille, who said that he had been despatched by the merchants of Lille to arrange for the importation of 10,000 tons of grain monthly for that city. He said that he had been provided with the necessary money and was authorised to represent the people of Lille in this matter; that he had been to the Foreign Office and that he was going immediately to consult the French Government. 'He proposed to us that we should join him in selling wheat to the people of Lille at 70 to 80 centimes per kilo (cost to us about 38 delivered at Lille), and that we should divide the profit with him and among ourselves individually. We threw him out of the office. Subsequent information as to his career showed that he had been discharged from the American Government

\* Letter of Gerard to Hoover, January 2, 1915.

† Hoover to Gerard, January 6, 1915.

service. You will therefore see this city's choice of a representative was a little unfortunate. The gentlemen in this organisation are here for humanitarian reasons. We are giving our time and paying our own expenses and do not propose to take advantage of the fact that we have a food monopoly to damn our immortal souls, nor do we propose to have any dealings with such characters as this.'\*

**Hoover offers to undertake the Provisionment of the invaded French Areas.**—Just before leaving for Berlin, Hoover submitted to Ambassador Page a proposal of the Commission to undertake the provisionment of the population of the occupied parts of Northern France, provided the French Government would supply the funds. 'If the people of Northern France are about to starve, and if the French Government wishes these people to be fed, it should make to us a formal request, and we will take the matter in hand with the same feeling of interest as we are experiencing in feeding the Belgians, in endeavouring to realise the best ideals of the American people and to do so in a manner which will be to the national credit. We would supply the given ration of flour to the whole people of Northern France, destitute as well as rich, the French Government undertaking to supply us with the money to do this and making such arrangements for the repayment of the money by the communes or other local authorities as they may see fit.' †

**The German Government approves Hoover's Proposal.**—In Berlin Hoover discussed with the Imperial authorities the question of the feeding of Northern France and found that they thoroughly approved the idea. They had had urgent recommendations from officials of the general staff that the Commission should be permitted to undertake the work. In his memorandum to the German authorities, Hoover therefore declared that the Commission for Relief in Belgium would be glad to undertake the provisioning of the civil population of Northern France, and asked that the German Government give the definite guarantees that all foodstuffs imported for Northern France should be free from requisition and should be devoted solely to the feeding of the civil population. This the Germans agreed to do, stating that the actual guarantee would be given by the high command of the German army.

**Temporary Relief Measures in the Meuse Valley.**—While in Brussels immediately after, Hoover discussed with the Ministers, the Comité National and the German authorities the proposal to extend the work to Northern France. The situation in the industrial communes of the Meuse valley south of Fumay had in the meantime become so distressing that the German army had made repeated requests to the Namur committee and to the Comité National that food should be sent to the communes of the Meuse valley as far as Sedan. On February 9, Major-General Longchamp, the German military governor of Namur, wrote Minister Whitlock, that the German authorities would grant the same protection to relief supplies that should be sent to the valley of the Meuse as far south as Sedan as already existed in the case of Belgium. Hoover therefore gave permission to the sending of certain small shipments of flour to the towns, such as Revin, Charleville and Sedan, which were suffering from the greatest shortage of food. Though he would give no guarantee that the shipments would continue, he authorised the extension of such temporary relief as the Belgian stocks would permit.

**The delivery of the First Supplies to Charleville and Sedan.**—Early in February, therefore, the first train-load of flour went from Namur to Charleville with J. L. Glenn,

\* Hoover to Chevillon, March 10, 1915.

† Hoover to Page, January 26, 1915.

American delegate at Namur, perched on the engine to make sure that the food reached its destination. Bowden, in his Overland, obtained a passport to go to Charleville to negotiate the details of the shipment. The flour was delivered to the mayors of Charleville and at Sedan against payment in cash, at the same price as obtained in Belgium. The American delegates returned to Namur with the Overland weighted down with the money which they had received. Such sporadic shipments were continued from time to time to the regions of the Meuse Valley on the same basis as this first one. No general provisionment of the people was undertaken and it was definitely provided that these shipments were in the nature of temporary relief. Pending the negotiations for a definite arrangement for the provisionment of Northern France, the American delegates continued to collect the money for each shipment. This had to be done, since the flour and other supplies which they delivered were the property of the Namur provincial committee.

Gifford Pinchot appointed to present the Commission's proposal to the French Government.—On returning to London Hoover at once took up energetically the question of the provisionment of Northern France. After a discussion with Colonel Hunsiker and other members of the Commission, it was decided to appoint Gifford Pinchot, who was well known in France and who had offered his services to the Commission, a member of the Commission and to send him to Paris with a letter to the President of the French Republic. Pinchot was charged to undertake negotiations with the French Government to secure sufficient financial aid for the Commission to permit it to feed the whole of the population of the occupied French districts. Mr. Pinchot proceeded immediately to Paris and attempted to obtain interviews with members of the French Government in order to lay the matter before them.

M. Guerin and his Mission to Paris.—At about the same time, Monsieur Louis Guerin was commissioned by various organisations of the occupied territories to go to Paris and to attempt to find a way of getting food for Northern France. The German army command thoroughly approved his mission and gave him the necessary passports to go to Paris via Switzerland. At the end of February there began, therefore, in Paris a series of negotiations which were to continue for the following month and which were finally to result in the Commission being authorised to take up the French relief work.

#### THE NEGOTIATIONS IN PARIS, FEBRUARY-MARCH 1915

Pinchot's interview with M. Ribot.—Mr. Pinchot reached Paris on February 18, but for five days was unable to obtain an interview with anybody in authority. Both M. Delcasse, Foreign Minister, and President Poincaré were inaccessible. On February 23, however, Pinchot was received by M. Ribot, Minister of Finance. M. Ribot declared that the French Government could give no formal approval to the item of the Belgian budget providing funds for the Commission for Relief in Belgium, but that money would be furnished to the Belgian Government and that it would be asked no inconvenient questions as to the manner of disposal of the sums advanced. He asked that the 400,000 people in France already fed by the Commission should not be deprived of their food-supply, and that the Commission should apply to the Belgian Government for additional funds, as it might need them. He said that the French Government was unwilling to undertake in its own name the feeding of the people in its own provinces, because to do so would be to put in the hands of the German Government the argument that the French Government was permitted

to feed its people, therefore the German Government should be permitted to feed the people of Germany. M. Ribot was careful to say that he was speaking not officially, but in his private character, and by his manner implied that the French Government was unwilling to refuse to feed its own people.

**The attitude of the French Government.**—Mr. Pinchot therefore felt sufficiently encouraged to continue the negotiations with the French Government and with the Belgian Government at Le Havre. The French Government held to the position that they could not themselves directly lend aid to the Commission, but intimated that they would reimburse the Belgian Government for any funds which the Belgian Government might disburse or might pay to the Commission for the purchase of foodstuffs for Northern France. Mr. Pinchot therefore went to Le Havre to take up the matter with the Belgian Government.

**M. Chevrillon's part in the Paris Negotiations.**—In the meantime Hoover got into communication with M. Louis Chevrillon, a prominent French mining engineer, and asked him to assist in the negotiations with the French Government. Chevrillon, through his acquaintance with many prominent men in public life in France, was able to get in touch with the competent officials of the French Government and to lend valuable aid in securing their approval to the Commission's proposals.

**The Commission's letter to the President of France.**—As soon as the real situation in the occupied parts was clearly laid before the French Government, their attitude became much more favourable. In his letter to the President, Hoover had pointed out the character of the work of the Commission and the results which it had achieved in Belgium. He described also the situation in France. 'The breadstuffs in this region have now been practically exhausted by the occupying army and the population and the supply of vegetables and meat will shortly be at an end. The blast of famine has already struck at the heart of certain localities and actual starvation is in progress. Representatives of these people have come over the Belgian frontier literally in scores, praying for food from our organisations. We have sent representatives throughout Northern France with the approval of the German authorities and I cannot too strongly impress upon your Excellency the extreme gravity of the situation.' Hoover went on to state that the Commission would gladly aid these people, but that its resources were already overtaxed to provide for the Belgians, and that, consequently, the Commission would be compelled to direct that no foodstuffs should be sent over the frontier from Belgium to France after March 1. 'At the present moment 400,000 French people are being fed by this Commission, but unless we receive financial assistance we cannot go on. It is no use dividing the food between the Belgians and the French in order that all may die. We have no right to take money provided to feed the Belgians and give it to the French.' The Germans, he said, would not feed the people. They had insufficient food-supplies for themselves and could do nothing for the French. 'If your Excellency could see the mobs of French women and children which surround every German camp from daylight to dark to gather refuse from the German soldiers, your Excellency would then believe that these French people will pay the last penalty unless someone comes to their rescue. The load of work and worry carried by this Commission is already large enough, but in the interests of common humanity, if the French Government can help us financially, we will feed these people. A great many of the communes have resources in the shape of paper money, and, in the case of the larger cities, ample resources in credit. We cannot, however, export either money or credit from Northern France, although we could undertake to take the obligations

from the communes and to hand them ultimately to the French Government in discharge of advances made to us in gold. I will not trouble your Excellency with any description of the personnel or organisation of this Commission—that is a matter that is open to investigation at all times—nor are we seeking the feeding of the people in Northern France ; but it happens that there is no other means through which this service can be performed at the present time, since this Commission alone is permitted to traverse the lines of the various belligerents and has international agreements which have taken a long time and much patience to perfect. In conclusion, before taking the heavy responsibility of saying to these people “you shall not have bread,” I make a last appeal to the French people themselves in the name of their own countrymen and countrywomen.’ \*

**Connett’s investigations in the Meuse Valley.**—While negotiations were proceeding in Paris, Commission representatives were making an investigation of the actual conditions in occupied France. Mr. A. N. Connett, director of the Brussels office, accompanied by Mr. C. B. Gibson, the head delegate for Namur, made an inspection of the conditions in the Meuse valley between Sedan and Givet. Their impressions were conveyed to Hoover in a letter of March 2. Connett reported that the temporary relief measures, referred to previously, had been continued with the permission of the Comité National since February 1, and that a number of shipments of food had been sent to Sedan, Charleville, Monthermé and Revin. Connett was permitted to talk to the mayor and chief citizens of the various towns he had visited and was accompanied by two officers of the German general staff, who arranged for him to see the actual conditions prevailing in the regions visited. ‘The result of these interviews,’ said Connett, ‘and what we saw ourselves, convinced Mr. Gibson and myself that the conditions in Northern France, in the part occupied by the German army, are actually far worse than the American people think the condition of Belgium is. This country was swept over suddenly by the French army and since has been occupied by the German forces. It is what is called the district of operations and, behind the district of operations, the *etappen*. In the operation and *etappen* zones the territory is exclusively under military government, and this government has always maintained the right to make requisitions of foodstuffs in the country occupied by it. You will therefore appreciate that all of France within the German lines is subject to requisitions of native foodstuffs and at this moment all the native foodstuffs have disappeared. . . . The people are allowed to purchase 100 grams of black military bread per person per day and occasionally are allowed a ration of meat. . . . The few potatoes in the country are rapidly disappearing. . . . I am convinced the civil population to-day is not receiving sufficient to maintain healthy life, and I am certain that in a very short time, perhaps in a fortnight, the conditions will be much worse and the suffering which now exists will increase and will be terrible. . . . The German authorities would like nothing better than to have food-supplies sent in for the civilian population in the same manner as it is now sent into Belgium, but this supply, if arranged for, could not be paid for by the inhabitants, as their money supply is practically exhausted. . . . Before I finish I would say that the real problem of destitution and misery to-day is in Northern France, and if we are to do anything to relieve the situation it should be done at once.’ †

**M. Guerin’s appeal to the French Government.**—This information was likewise

\* Letter from Hoover to the President of the French Republic, February 17, 1915.

† Connett to Hoover, March 2, 1915.



transmitted to the French Government and probably contributed toward the final decision. On March 9, Chevillon wrote Hoover from Paris that he had seen M. Guerin and that the latter had begun negotiations with various Ministers, had seen M. Poincaré and M. Viviani, and expected to come to a solution of the problem within a few days. M. Guerin had put himself in touch with the senators and deputies from the occupied parts and with their aid had managed to bring sufficient pressure on the French Government to secure their approval of the Commission's proposals.

**Arrangements for Indirect Subsidies.**—Mr. Pinchot was summoned by the Baron de Brocqueville, President of the Belgian Council of Ministers, to confirm the arrangements that had already been stated to Pinchot by M. Ribot, viz., that the Belgian Government would give the Commission what funds it needed to feed the French population north of the German lines. At this meeting there were present also M. Guerin and M. Eugene Tourn, senator for the Aisne and Vice-President of the Senate. The latter was chiefly responsible for the decision of the Government to aid the Commission. Pinchot was given the assurance that the Commission could immediately proceed to make arrangements to feed the population of Northern France and that the Belgian Government would advance the money required. This offer, however, was made subject to the condition that the Germans should give absolute guarantees that the foods so imported would not be requisitioned and that they should permit at least five American delegates to be stationed in the various districts of Northern France to inspect the distribution of foods. A further condition was that the municipalities were to take over officially the distribution of food and that the communal governments were to sign obligations guaranteeing to pay after the war for all quantities of provisions received by them.

**Guarantees asked for from the Germans.**—This then was the arrangement proposed by the French Government, indirectly through the Belgian Government, for the provisioning of the occupied part of Northern France. As soon as Hoover received the intimation that the Commission would be assured of the necessary funds, he wired to Rotterdam a message to be transmitted to Ambassador Gerard, stating that the Commission had secured sufficient money to feed the French people, subject to the condition that the German Government would undertake that these foodstuffs would not be interfered with in any manner, and that at least five American members of the Commission should have the right to move about to superintend the work of distribution. Hoover informed Gerard that he would not be allowed to proceed with shipments until these guarantees were given, and asked the Ambassador to place the matter before the Imperial Government.\* Hoover had sent this message to Gerard, because Whitlock had telegraphed him that the guarantees desired should be secured from the Central Government at Berlin and not from the Governor-General in Belgium, as the latter had no jurisdiction over the areas occupied by the active armies. † The negotiations which followed and which resulted in the signing of a convention between the Commission and the high command of the German army will be narrated in the next section.

**Negotiations to secure Wheat in France.**—Once the financial support necessary for the French relief work was assured, it became necessary to find the food-supplies. The general shortage of grain throughout the world and the abnormal difficulty in securing

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\* Hoover to Rotterdam Office, March 9, 1915.

† Whitlock to Rotterdam Office, March 8, 1915.

shipping to carry cargoes made it extremely difficult on a moment's notice to secure food or to ship it to Belgium. On March 16 Hoover wrote to Chevrillon that the total stocks of the Commission in Belgium were only sufficient for ten days for the rations of that country and that the arrivals were not sufficient to permit the diversion of any of the Belgian stocks for use in Northern France. It therefore became necessary to take up with the French Government the matter of securing quantities of wheat from them for immediate use.

On March 15 Hoover telegraphed Pinchot in Paris that on the basis of the Commission's experience it was estimated that two million French people would require monthly 13,000 tons of wheat, 1,200 tons of beans, 1,200 tons of rice, and 500 tons of bacon. This would imply a smaller ration than that in force in Belgium and would require a subsidy of £300,000 a month. He said, further, that they could probably secure supplies to begin deliveries at once if they had the money to make the purchases and that they should at once receive sufficient funds for three months' supply.

Pinchot and Chevrillon in Paris conferred with the French Government as to the possibility of securing a considerable quantity of wheat for immediate shipment. The French Government finally agreed to turn over to the Commission some 10,000 tons of wheat that were *en route*, to ask the British Government to turn over 10,000 tons of flour for the Commission, and to secure further quantities if they should be needed. This practically settled the problem of finding wheat for immediate shipment and made it possible for the Commission to begin delivering flour or wheat in the various districts of the North of France during the month of April.

**The Plan of sending Relief through Switzerland.**—During the progress of these negotiations there had arisen the suggestion that the people of Northern France should be fed by Switzerland, which would obtain food in France or import it via Marseilles, and ship it, by agreement with the German Government, through Switzerland and Germany to Northern France. Senator Touron had been active in these negotiations and had actually arranged for sending provisions through a committee to be established at Berne. It was reported in Brussels in March that two Swiss army officers, accompanied by a German officer, had made a tour of Northern France and had stated that they intended to take over the provisionment of the French population back to the German lines. But the French Government soon became convinced of the impracticability of the Swiss proposal. It would have been practically impossible to secure in Germany transport for 10,000 to 15,000 tons monthly and the cost would have been prohibitive. The Swiss plan was therefore abandoned and the whole care of the population in Northern France placed in the hands of the Commission.

**Financial Arrangements.**—Hoover communicated to the Belgian Minister of Finance, Monsieur van der Vyvere, on March 16, a statement of the financial situation of the Commission in view of undertaking the French work. The actual financial arrangements were not, however, concluded until the visit of Mr. Hoover and M. Francqui to Le Havre and Paris, March 20 to 23. Francqui had come out of Belgium to try to negotiate some permanent financial arrangement for the continuation of the relief work. Hoover, Francqui and Sengier left London for Le Havre on March 20 and were there received and entertained by the Belgian Ministers. The whole problem of the finances of the Commission was discussed with the Belgian Ministers, but no very satisfactory conclusion was reached, and the Commission was given no definite assurance that the French Government had yet made

a satisfactory agreement with the Belgian Government in regard to the feeding of the civil population of the French occupied territory.

**The Support of the French Government.**—At Paris, M. Delcasse, Minister of Foreign Affairs, received Messrs. Hoover, Francqui and Sengier on March 22, and assured them of the appreciation of the French Government for their willingness to take over the provisionment of occupied France. M. Delcasse was very surprised to hear from M. Francqui that the Belgian Government had not notified the Commission that a satisfactory financial understanding had been reached. He at once arranged a meeting with M. Ribot. At this meeting it was stated that the French Government wished to have no official relations with the Commission for Relief in Belgium, nor with the Comité National, but that it would be grateful to these two organisations if they would help the civil population in the occupied territory. Both MM. Delcasse and Ribot declared that Viviani had come to an agreement with the Baron de Brocqueville by which the Belgian Government should draw and place at the disposal of the Commission for Relief, from the credit of 250 million francs opened up for the Belgian Government at the Banque de France, all sums necessary for the feeding of the population of the North of France. It was stated that all sums so drawn would be replaced by the French Government, so that the Belgian Government would not suffer any diminution of the funds for its own needs. It was further agreed that the Belgian Finance Minister should immediately hand to the Commission one million pounds, and that in addition a monthly subsidy of £500,000 should be paid, beginning April 1.

**The Payment of Subsidies by the Belgian Government.**—On March 23, Francqui wrote the Belgian Minister of Finance, asking him to turn over immediately one million pounds for the French purchases. There was some delay in actually securing the money, because the Belgian Minister had not received notification to turn over more than £300,000, but finally, on March 26, M. van der Vyvere turned over to M. Sengier a cheque for twenty-five million francs on the following understanding: 'The Belgian Government, in conformity with the views of the French Government, advances to the C.R.B. a sum of twenty-five million francs for which the French Government will repay them later. This sum is destined to the immediate purchase of a stock of provisions for feeding the invaded parts of France. The capital of twenty-five million francs must be renewed by the sale of provisions at cost price to the population of the invaded French departments, unless the French Government gives formal authorisation to gratuitously dispose of a part of the foodstuffs.' The arrangements for the financing of the work in Northern France were thus completed, and it remained only to organise the work itself in Northern France and to secure the necessary guarantees from the German Government.

**Chevillon appointed French Representative on the Commission.**—At the suggestion of Mr. Hoover, M. Louis Chevillon was appointed a member of the Commission representing the French population. As a member of the executive committee of the Commission he was in constant touch with the operations of the Commission, and through his energetic activities in Paris he was able to win over the unconditional support of the French Government to the work of the Commission. This was an invaluable aid in later and difficult diplomatic negotiations. The French Government became one of the strongest supporters of the Commission and insisted throughout that it should be permitted to continue its work, and that the people in Belgium and Northern France should be fed in spite of all political and diplomatic obstacles that might appear.

## THE AGREEMENT WITH THE GERMAN ARMY HEADQUARTERS

Negotiations with Berlin.—Hoover had asked Gerard early in March to intervene with the Imperial Government to obtain from them the guarantees for the North of France work which they had promised in February. He telegraphed again a week later asking Gerard to ascertain the truth of a Swiss statement that the distribution of food in Northern France could be supervised only by officers in uniform.\* It would have interfered seriously with the Commission's plans if it had been necessary to obtain army officers in place of the civilian delegates who had done so satisfactory work in Belgium.

Gerard transmitted Hoover's queries to the German Minister for Foreign Affairs on March 17. In a reply, dated March 27, Herr von Jagow stated that the necessary guarantees would be given by the German army itself and that Germany did not require that the supervision of distribution should be made by neutral officers in uniform. 'In view of the experiences in Belgium,' he said, 'we would also admit in the French districts neutral commissioners without uniform.'

Von Bissing's Guarantee Protecting Food for Northern France.—At the request of the Imperial German Government, Baron von Bissing gave, in behalf of the General Government in Belgium, definite guarantees that so far as the General Government was concerned, the importation for the French civil population would enjoy the same protection as those imported for the Belgians. 'As regards the feeding of the French population south of the Belgian frontier, I give for my part the express and formal declaration that the supplies which the Commission for Relief in Belgium in association with the Comité National may introduce into France through the occupied territories from neutral countries abroad will remain free from all military requisitions.†

The First Agreement with the German General Headquarters.—Hoover had notified the Brussels office of the Commission and Minister Whitlock of the success of the negotiations in Paris and of the necessity for obtaining guarantees from the Germans. Mr. Connett therefore communicated with the German general headquarters and was invited to go to the headquarters to discuss the matter. Major-General Zoellner, chief of staff of the general quartermaster, represented the high command of the army. Mr. Connett showed Hoover's telegram, dated London, March 18, stating that the Commission had secured funds for the provisionment of Northern France, provided that the food would be guaranteed against requisition and that representatives of the Commission could supervise the distribution. General Zoellner gave the assurance that the goods imported would never be used for the army, but would be devoted solely for the civilian population of the occupied parts. He stated also that the German army would agree in principle to the supervision of food distribution by American officers in uniform. He refused to give any assurance as to the native foods. All existing stocks had already been seized by the German military authorities, consequently the French population had nothing left but poultry and vegetables. As to the new crop, it must be strictly understood that the German authorities should have a free hand, because by supplying seed, labour, horses, motor-ploughs, etc., they had themselves performed the labour necessary for obtaining the crop and they were already paying for the use of the land and for French labour. Therefore,

\* Hoover to Gerard, March 16, 1915.

† Von Bissing to von Jagow, March 21, 1915.

he said, the Germans must reserve to themselves the right to seize the indigenous harvest. General Zoellner further assured Mr. Connett that the military authorities would show the greatest liberty of treatment toward the Commission with regard to transport facilities, freight-rates, etc. Connett immediately informed Hoover of the conference and of the readiness of the Germans to give the guarantees referred to.

Pinchot selected as Chief Representative in Northern France.—In the meantime it had been arranged that Mr. Pinchot should accompany Francoqui back to Brussels and should become the chief representative of the Commission for the work in Northern France, acting under the director in Brussels. Hoover therefore wired Connett on March 25 that all details of the French relief work would be explained and arranged by Francoqui and Pinchot on their arrival in Brussels on the following Monday. Hoover stated also that the German Government did not require officers in uniform to supervise the distribution, and he therefore proposed to carry on the French work by extending the Belgian organization and by establishing five or six dépôts in Northern France, with an American representative in charge of each station.

Pinchot Refused Admission into Belgium.—A very embarrassing incident occurred when M. Pinchot attempted to enter Belgium. He was given his passports in due form by the German consul in Rotterdam, but on arriving at the frontier was held up by German secret service agents and his luggage thoroughly searched. He was taken with his wife under escort to Antwerp and held until the next morning. He was then told that he would not be allowed to go on to Brussels and was immediately sent back across the frontier into Holland. The Germans claimed that this action was due to the fact that Mr. Pinchot had made statements reflecting upon the Germans, and was known to be pro-ally in his sentiments.

This incident created considerable consternation among the members of the Commission and occasioned some delay in getting the work in France organized. Hoover finally instructed Connett and Mr. O. T. Crosby, his successor as director in Brussels, to complete the arrangements with the Germans in co-operation with Mr. John B. White of the London office, who was immediately sent to Brussels, and to begin the distribution of food in France.

First Shipments to the Lille-Valenciennes Districts.—At the beginning of April, Connett had given instructions to the American delegates in the provinces of Namur and Hainaut that they could immediately begin shipping flour and other supplies to those districts in Northern France where the distress due to scarcity of food was greatest. In the first week of April 200 tons of flour were shipped from Mons to Queant, near Cambrai, and 265 tons to Valenciennes. Orders had also been given to send 1,000 tons to Lille from Tournai, but it was found impossible to do this immediately because of the difficulty in getting lightermen to go into France and of getting sufficient freight cars to transport the flour to Lille.

Robinson Smith's Recommendations.—Robinson Smith, delegate at Mons, reported to Connett on April 7 that he had secured permissions for the Commission to send its lighters on the canals from the Scheldt to Lille and from Tournai to Valenciennes and recommended that the easiest way to supply the populous industrial district, extending from the neighbourhood of Lille south of Cambrai, would be to make lighter-shipments direct from Rotterdam to the various destination points in France. Smith reported also that the French committee had asked for 15,000 tons of flour monthly, one-third to be sent to Valenciennes,

the other two-thirds to the region Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing. Smith provided the French committees of these regions with an account of the system of food-control and distribution used in the province of Hainaut, and supplied them with the forms and instructions he had devised for use in his province. In his letter to Connett, Smith also discussed the question of the activity of the American delegates in France, and suggested that the delegates for the northern part should be stationed at Valenciennes and that the head office might be located there. He had not learned whether the American delegates would be permitted to be present at the meeting of the French committees, but said he thought that this was not of much importance. He thought that the American delegate would need only to see that the flour was protected in the mills, properly and equally distributed to the communes and the bread controlled through communal dépôts.

The framing of the Agreement with the German Army.—While the first shipments were on their way to France, M. Guerin arrived at Brussels to confer with Francqui and with White, Connett and Crosby. They decided that it would be impossible to go any further in the French work until they had a more definite agreement with the German general headquarters as to the manner in which the work should be carried on. Major von Kessler, of the general staff, was therefore sent to Brussels to discuss with them the arrangements for the provisioning of Northern France. After conferences lasting two or three days, a definite agreement was reached and, on the approval of this by the general headquarters, it was signed on April 13 by von Kessler, representing the supreme command of the German army, and Mr. O. T. Crosby, representing the Commission for Relief in Belgium.

The provisions of the Convention of April 13.—The convention signed at this time consisted of one major agreement and two minor agreements. These are too long to be published in full here, but will be found in the volume of special reports, published by the Commission in 1918. It was stated that the supreme command of the German army gave its consent to the Commission undertaking the provisioning of the population of the occupied French territory; that all goods imported for this purpose would be reserved exclusively to the French population; and that strict orders would be sent out by the supreme command to the effect that these goods must never be seized and that all goods not distributed should remain at the exclusive disposal of the C.R.B. The C.R.B. was authorised to appoint American delegates to represent it in the occupied territory. They should have the privileges granted in the supplementary agreement No. 1 and should satisfy themselves of the carrying out of the promises given in the supplementary agreement No. 2. The food was to be distributed according to the determination of the C.R.B., in conjunction with the German military authorities, by French trustees, who were to be nominated by the French communes, subject to approval by the German military authorities and the C.R.B. The actual details of the work would be attended to by these French representatives. The supreme command also gave the assurance that every facility would be provided for the transportation of supplies, which would be admitted free of duty and would be charged the same freight-rates as in Belgium. Special placards were to be issued with the stamp of the German military authorities, to be affixed to all means of transport and to all storehouses, so as to protect the supplies against the possibility of seizure. The German authorities stipulated, however, that they could cancel the agreement at any time without assigning any reasons, by merely giving notice to the C.R.B. In such case, however, the goods then in French territory should be disposed of in accordance with the

agreement, and the American delegates could remain to discharge their duties with respect to these goods, so long as the stocks lasted. The supreme command of the German army also declared that its right to make requisitions of native foodstuffs against 'bons' was in no way affected by this agreement and that it reserved all its rights in respect to the new crop.

**The functions of the American Delegates.**—The first supplementary agreement provided that the delegates of the C.R.B. were authorised to satisfy themselves that the goods supplied by the C.R.B. were being used in accordance with the guarantees given. They would be afforded every possible assistance in carrying out this duty by the German military authorities, but, in view of the military situation, they would be expected to limit themselves absolutely to such matters as were within the scope of their duties. Their activities in the zone of the field army would be restricted by the military situation from time to time. As had been decided, the occupied territory in France was to be divided into six districts, each coinciding with the territory occupied by one of the five German armies operating in those occupied territories, save in the case of the sixth army, which was divided into the two districts of Lille and Valenciennes because of the density of the population of that area. As each army was practically a law unto itself, this was the only method of dividing the territory which was practicable. Consequently, there were to be six distribution districts, each with two American delegates, if desired by the Commission, and a central office at the general headquarters at Charleville. The American delegates would receive, free of charge, quarters, officers' rations and suitable attendance; a military motor-car was to be placed at their disposal for the journeys necessitated by their duties; each delegate would have a special passport signed by the general quartermaster, guaranteeing his personal safety. At the central office in Charleville a delegate of the Comité National would be permitted in the place of one of the two American delegates, in order to take charge of the accounts. In each district there was to be an officer, speaking French and English, to accompany the delegates on their journeys and 'generally assist them in every possible way.' Within each district there were to be organised sub-districts where regional magazines would be created under control of representatives of the French population. The delegate would be authorised to visit these regional centres and to receive there personally the representatives of the various communes of the region. In case, for military reasons, the delegate was not permitted to visit the regional centre he should be at liberty to summon representatives of the communes to his place of residence, through the military authorities, for the transaction of business. All correspondence, including the personal correspondence of the delegates, was to be received and forwarded by the accompanying officer (Begleits-Offizier). This officer would also transmit free of charge all necessary telephone and telegraph messages. Every delegate upon entering his position would be required to take on himself 'the obligation to carry out his duties in such a manner as may be expected from an honourable citizen of a neutral state.'

**The Agreement as to Transportation.**—The second supplementary agreement related to the details of transportation matters: provided that no canal tolls were to be charged; that the Commission should be granted a reduction of fifty per cent. from normal railway freight-rates; that all railway cars should be provided with labels showing that the contents were the property of the C.R.B.; that the railway cars would be delivered sealed at destination, but that delegates would not be allowed to accompany them in transit.

**The part played by the German Officers.**—The agreements just described provided

a much more definite basis for the work of the Commission in Northern France than existed in the case of its activities in Belgium. The chief difference in the situation lay in the fact that in France special officers were detailed to watch over the delegates and the operations of the Relief Commission in each district. In the course of time these *begleits-offiziers* came practically to take into their own hands most of the details involved in the work of provisionment. For the most part these officers showed a great interest and took an immense pride in the work of the Commission. They came even to consider themselves as part of the Commission. Most of them adhered faithfully to the obligations of their position and took a sincere interest in the welfare of the population of their district. They came to regard any violation of the German guarantees in France as a personal reflection upon themselves, because it was their duty to see that such violations did not occur. Therefore it was the officer and not the American delegate who would take up and press complaints about irregularities of various kinds.

The American Delegate in France.—The American delegate in France had duties entirely different from those of the delegates of Belgium. In Belgium the delegate played a considerable part in the administration of the business details connected with the shipment and distribution of food. He could travel freely about in his automobile to inspect the operations of the Belgian relief committees and to investigate complaints. In France, however, the business details were handled almost exclusively by the German officers and the French committees. The delegate received the bills of lading and received reports from the French committees as to their distribution. He could go nowhere, however, without being accompanied by the German officer attached to him. He could make no investigations nor inspections unless permitted to do so by his officer. The officers themselves were constantly travelling about the districts and the Americans nearly always accompanied them. In practice, therefore, the American delegate in France was almost constantly riding about his district with his German officer, talking to the French committees and to the French warehouse managers. Usually they would attend the occasional meetings of the French regional district committees. In some of the districts the committee of the district practically never met. Thus, in the district of Vervins the only committee meetings were those of the regions. The same was true for the districts of St. Quentin and Longwy. In the district of Charleville representatives of various regions, or 'syndicats' as they were known, were permitted to meet once a month. The American delegate was always present at this meeting. In general it was the American delegate's duty to keep an eye upon the situation, to keep his ears open and his mouth shut. Freed from the details of the business office, he had a correspondingly greater diplomatic task. He had first and last to get on well with his German officer. If he had the confidence of this officer, he enjoyed much greater liberty and was given much more information about what was actually going on than would otherwise have been possible and in general. In spite of the limitations under which he worked, the delegate in the North of France did keep *au courant* of nearly everything that was going on, at least everything that affected the 'ravitailement.'

The Saturday Meeting of Delegates.—After a short while the custom of holding weekly meetings of the delegates for France in Brussels was established. The delegates would leave France on Friday in time to be in Brussels for a Saturday morning meeting, and would usually return to their posts on Sunday evening or Monday morning. This custom of holding weekly meetings was extremely valuable for two reasons. In the first place it made it possible to maintain direct and personal communications with the Brussels



office and to give confidential reports of the situation which could not have been entrusted to the mail, censored as it was by the German officers. The Brussels office therefore had weekly confidential reports as to the situation in all the districts of Northern France. In the second place it afforded a much needed relaxation to the delegates themselves. After having lived a week in the same house with his German officer and his attaches, after having been constantly in the presence of German soldiers and officers for a week, and after having been forced to maintain a rigid guard on his tongue, the delegate found the Saturday trip to Brussels an indispensable vacation. In Brussels he was free. He had the companionship of other Americans and friendly intercourse with the Belgians. The nervous strain of the work in France was so great that even with the weekly visits to Brussels most of the delegates in France found themselves physically unable to remain much longer than six months at a time in a French post. In fact quite a number had nervous breakdowns after only a month or two in France. This is one indication of the difficulty and the strain connected with a task of such an essentially diplomatic character.

The Germans and their Convention.—On the whole it must be said that the Germans faithfully adhered to the letter of their convention in Northern France. But few cases were ever reported in which relief food had been seized, and in these cases the higher German authorities themselves showed the greatest energy in punishing the offenders and in preventing the recurrence of such incidents. The German officers, it is true, gradually encroached on the privileges and power of the delegates. The officers remained constantly at their post, the American delegates changed frequently. As each new delegate came to his post, ignorant of the conditions, he found himself more and more dependent upon the German officer, and the officer on the other hand found himself in more and more complete command of the situation. But these officers themselves took very seriously their obligation. It was their duty as soldiers to see that the other German authorities adhered to the convention approved by the supreme command, and the officers were very energetic in enforcing the assurances and guarantees given by the German army in these first conventions and in later supplementary agreements.

#### THE FUNCTIONING OF THE RELIEF WORK IN NORTHERN FRANCE

'Ravitaillement' Districts in Northern France.—It has already been stated that in the convention of April 13, 1915, it was agreed that Northern France should be divided into districts, for the purpose of provisionment, which coincided with the districts occupied by the respective armies on the western front. From north to south there were five such armies and six districts for food distribution in the occupied French territory. The most northern district, that of Lille, contained the cities Lille, Roubaix, Tourcoing and the adjacent territory. This was the smallest district in area, the largest in population. The delegates for Lille were not permitted to live in the city, which lay only ten kilometres behind the German lines, but were stationed at Valenciennes and lived with the officer and delegate for the district of Valenciennes. Toward the end of 1916 the sixth army, operating in the Lille-Valenciennes district, was divided into two armies. In consequence the Belgian district of Tournai was included in the etape of the army operating about Lille, and the American delegate with his officer took up residence at Tournai. The Valenciennes district, the second in number of people fed, included the towns of Valenciennes, Douai, Cambrai and Lens. South of the Valenciennes district lay the district of St. Quentin in

the territory held by the second German army. The headquarters of the district were in the town of that name until the Somme offensive compelled the Hindenburg retreat, then the headquarters were moved to Hautmont, near Maubeuge, which was attached to the district. The territory held by the seventh German army included portions of the French departments of the Oise and the Aisne and was known as the district of Vervins. Vervins was quite an insignificant village, but was chosen as the place of residence of the American delegate and his officer. The third German army occupied most of the department of the Ardennes and that part of the Champagne held by the Germans. At first it had been intended to make Rethel the seat of the American delegate, but this intention was never carried out and finally the great headquarters town, Charleville, became the residence, both of the chief representative for Northern France and of the delegate for the district of Charleville. The sixth district, that of the fifth German army, was the longest district and the one in which the greatest amount of travelling was necessary for the American delegate. This district included the upper part of the Meuse Valley, the mining district of Longwy-Briey and the long narrow strip of French territory occupied by the Germans in the Vosges. The headquarters for this district were at Longwy and it was known as the district of Longwy.

The following table gives the number of communes and the population of each of the six districts in Northern France in 1915:—

	Communes.	Population.
Lille .. .. .	107	622,696
Valenciennes .. .. .	339	591,155
St. Quentin .. .. .	511	450,424
Vervins .. .. .	431	222,646
Charleville .. .. .	339	150,476
Longwy .. .. .	406	112,218
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	2,133	2,149,615
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**Transportation Facilities.**—The food was sent to these districts either directly from Rotterdam by lighter or from transshipment points in Belgium by rail. The districts of Lille and Valenciennes and parts of the district of St. Quentin could be reached directly by canal, and the greater part of the supplies sent to these districts were sent by lighter. These districts possessed flour-mills and were able consequently to mill their own flour. The districts of Vervins, Charleville and Longwy, however, possessed practically no available flour-mills and could not be reached by canal. To provide flour for these districts, wheat was shipped into Belgium and milled there, at first partly at Namur, partly in the Hainaut and partly at Louvain, but later on, to establish greater control over the milling and for reasons of economy, the milling for these districts was practically all done at Nimy, Louvain and Brussels, in mills that worked exclusively for the Commission. The sundry supplies, such as beans, peas, rice, bacon, lard, coffee and sugar, were usually shipped by lighter from Rotterdam to Brussels and transhipped there to be forwarded by rail to the various destination points in France. There came times when the pressure on the German railroads made it very difficult to secure railway cars, but these periods were seldom of more than a few weeks' duration and in general the German railway authorities were able to provide the transportation necessary to move the food to France.

**Methods of Food Distribution.**—When the food arrived in France it was divided in each district between the various regions in proportion to their population. Generally each of these regions would deliver to the communes within the region once every fortnight, the communes themselves being required to come to the regional dépôt to secure their rations for the coming fortnight. The rations in general were fixed at the head office in each district, either by the French committee or by the American delegate acting in co-operation with the French committee. A definite ration basis was fixed early in the work and in general this was maintained, though the quantities were changed from time to time. The communal administrations were in every case in charge of the local distribution to the population, and the food in general was delivered to the individuals once every two weeks ; in the case of the district of Vervins once every ten days.

**Financial Arrangements.**—The financial operations connected with the distribution of supplies were rather complicated. In the first place the Comité National acted as the intermediary between the C.R.B. and the Comité Français with its subsidiary committees in each district. The Comité Français existed in name, but hardly in fact, as no meetings were ever held. It maintained an office at Brussels, however, under the direction of M. Le Blan. M. Van Bree, secretary of the Comité National, was delegated by it to look after its transactions with the Comité Français, and decisions in regard to matters relating to the relief work in France were usually made at Brussels by the director of the Commission in co-operation with M. Van Bree and M. Le Blan. The Commission billed to the Comité National all food and clothing intended for France. The Comité National in turn rebilled the goods to the district committees of the Comité Français at the same price billed by the C.R.B. The C.R.B. fixed, in co-operation with the Comité Français, a maximum price for sale to the consumer, and this was large enough to cover the cost of transportation of the goods to France and delivering them there to the communes. In most cases, in fact, the prices fixed by the regional committees for the sale of food to the consumers were considerably lower than these maximum prices.

**Obligations of the French Communes.**—In accordance with the arrangements made by the Commission for obtaining the subsidy from the French Government through the Belgian Government, the communes to which food was delivered were required to assume an obligation to repay, within six months after the end of the war, the value of all supplies received by them. The Comité National took over the financial responsibility from the Commission on the delivery of the supplies intended for France in Belgium. The Comité National was protected in turn by the various district committees in France, each of which assumed the full financial responsibility for all food which it received. Many of the wealthy men in the various districts gave personal guarantees for the repayment of these funds. The various regional committees, or 'syndicats,' gave another obligation to the district committee for the sums represented by the food they received. Finally, the regional committees had their obligations protected by promises from the communal administrations to pay the full value of the food distributed in the commune. This rather complicated financial arrangement was made necessary by the lack of any means of communication within the occupied territory in France and by the necessity of having the financial responsibility for the work of the Commission ultimately borne by the communal administrations in the occupied part of France. Practically, in the financing of the relief work, it can be said that the money advanced by the French Government was a loan to the French communes in the invaded area, this loan being delivered to the communes through the medium of the

Commission, the Comité National and the Comité Français with its sub-committees, in the form of food.

The Distribution of the Rations.—Various methods were used in the communes to assure the distribution to the whole population. It was made one of the essential conditions of the delivery of food in France that every person should have his full ration, whether or not he could pay. This made it necessary for the commune to bear the burden of supporting those who were wholly or partially destitute. In some of the districts, as in the district of Charleville, the population was divided into three classes. The first paid cash for their rations; the second received their rations in return for a promise to pay the cost after the war; the third were the completely destitute to whom food was distributed gratuitously. In other regions, such as Lille and Valenciennes, everyone was required to pay cash (i.e. in 'bons de ville') for their rations. The poor were provided with sufficient sums by the communal charity officers to enable them to pay for their rations. Through the establishment of loan societies, money was advanced to those people who possessed property but were without actual resources. In this way they were enabled to pay for their food. The average cost of the ration per week was originally approximately three to four francs, but the rise in food prices and the increases in the ration finally increased the cost of the weekly ration to approximately six to eight francs. The number of those receiving food on credit, viz. on promise to repay after the war, naturally increased greatly as time went on. In the beginning, seventy per cent. of the population were able to pay for their rations. In the early months of 1917 less than forty per cent. were paying, the rest having been transferred to the credit list. By the arrangements thus devised, everyone in the occupied territory was assured food and the responsibility for payment was postponed until after the war.

The food was distributed in the French districts in much the same way as in Belgium, save that in France it was the communal administration that directly controlled and managed the food distribution, whereas in Belgium this was done by local committees and not officially by the communal administrations. Every family had its ration-card and received its food from the communal dépôts at stated intervals, usually once in fifteen days. The bread was baked in the usual bakeries under rigid contracts with the communal administrations. The baker was required to maintain the quality of his bread and to deliver an average of 135 kilos of bread for every 100 kilos of flour received. The bread was distributed usually four times weekly. Bread-cards were issued in most of the districts. In some places, however, bakers submitted lists of their customers to the communal administration and no individual cards were required.

At first the Commission imported little else than flour into Northern France, with small supplements of rice, beans, bacon and lard and maize products, but later on a definite ration was established. This was changed from time to time as the Commission was able to increase its importations.

#### THE BELGIAN ETAPPEN REGION

The Work of the Commission in Flanders.—At this point it is interesting to compare the work of the Commission in Northern France and in the Flanders. Both regions were under the immediate control of the commands of the various armies, which were responsible only to great headquarters. The Governor-General in Belgium had no jurisdiction over

the Flanders, but had arranged, in December 1914, with the command of the fourth German army for the extension of the work of the Commission and the Comité National into both East and West Flanders. After some months the difficulties connected with the work in the Flanders became so numerous that the Commission found it necessary to establish a new and definite basis for its work there. The agreement which had been made with the general headquarters for the extension of the relief work to the occupied parts of Northern France formed a precedent which might be followed in organising the work in Flanders on a more satisfactory basis. The Commission had likewise come into direct touch with the German headquarters and the general quartermaster and were able therefore to approach the highest authorities directly without being compelled to negotiate through the Governor-General in Belgium.

**The Agreement with the Fourth German Army.**—Mr. Crosby, the director of the Commission in Brussels from April to October 1915, had signed the convention with the German authorities for the extension of the work into France. Subsequently Mr. Crosby took up with general headquarters and with the command of the fourth army the difficulties the Commission had encountered through the lack of a definite understanding with the German army. After some preliminary negotiations an agreement was reached early in July (July 6 ?), which was modelled on the convention of April 13 relating to France.

In this the *etappen* inspection of the fourth army gave the assurance that the imported food-supplies would never be requisitioned, but would be reserved exclusively for the Belgian civil population; all supplies which remained undistributed were to be at the exclusive disposal of the Commission. Every facility was to be provided for the transport of food-supplies, which were to be admitted free of duty and pay the same freight rates as were in force in Belgium. All shipments and warehouses were to be labelled with placards stamped by the German military authorities, declaring their character and protecting them from seizure. As in the case of the French agreement, the *etappen* inspection reserved the right to cancel the agreement by a mere notification. They reserved the right also to requisition any crops that might be produced. The American delegates of the Commission were to be admitted on the same conditions as applied to Northern France and were to have the same privileges. An officer was to be detailed to work with them whose duties and position were exactly the same as those of the officers who were detailed to watch over the Commission's activities in France. From a military point of view the officer in Flanders was directly responsible to the headquarters at Charleville or the general quartermaster. In general the work in Flanders was on the same basis as that in France.

In the Flanders the actual distribution of food was in the hands of provincial committees, subordinate to the Comité National. The food-ration distributed and the general regulations as to food-distributions were the same as those in the territory of the General Government and differed essentially from the rations and regulations in France. In general the French ration was considerably larger than that in the Flanders or in the 'occupied' district. This was due to the fact that a much larger quantity of native produce was available for the provisionment of the population than was the case in France.

**Attitude of German Military Authorities toward the Commission.**—The attitude of the German authorities toward the work of the Commission at this time is admirably illustrated by a letter written to Mr. Crosby on August 18, 1915, by the chief of staff of the *etappen* inspection of the fourth army. He said: 'The *etappen* inspection is pleased to inform you that it fully recognises the difficult and delicate task undertaken by the C.R.B.

It welcomes the C.R.B. as it would welcome any other undertaking created for the sake of humanity and which seems appropriate to relieve the hardships, caused by the war, from which the Belgian population in particular is suffering. For this reason the etappen inspection will give the C.R.B. every possible assistance as far as military exigencies permit. The etappen inspection attaches great value to the continuance, in general as heretofore, of the ravitaillement of Belgium.'

It was in this spirit that the officers of the German general staff, whose duties brought them in contact with the Commission, dealt with the problems of provisioning the regions occupied by the active armies.

**Relations with Major von Kessler.**—Major von Kessler of the general staff, was for the first year the principal officer to whom the Commission looked for the solution of the many difficult problems which arose out of its work in a territory so close to the line of operations. Major von Kessler always maintained a sympathetic and friendly attitude toward the Commission, and in general the Commission did not have to encounter in its work in France the continual suspicion that was directed against it by many of the higher authorities in Belgium. In France its work went on for the most part very smoothly and without the dozens of petty annoyances and aggravating incidents that continually arose in the territory of the General Government.

## CHAPTER VII

NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE CROP  
OF 1915

## NECESSITY FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE NEW CROP

Von Bissing Refuses to Exempt 1915 Crop from Requisition.—The letter of Baron von Bissing of the date of March 11, declaring that the previous guarantees for the protection of native food related only to existing stocks and not to future crops, made a whole new series of negotiations necessary. As Hoover expressed it in a letter to Ambassador Gerard at Berlin, 'the really important situation, which I have set out in a separate letter, revolves around our desire to protect this year's harvest in Belgium, for, if the present military situation is going to continue, there is nothing in God's world which will save the Belgians from extinction except their own products, and if these are going to be taken away from them we may just as well throw up our hands to-day as next August.'\*

Zimmermann had, it is true, verbally assured the American Ambassador, the Spanish Ambassador and the Dutch Minister in Berlin, on December 26, 1914, that the Germans 'will not make any further requisitions of food-supplies in Belgium while the international commissions are sending in food, and for a reasonable time after the last delivery.'† But when confirmed in writing this assurance shrank to a mere promise that the troops in Belgium would be 'prohibited from requisitioning food or forage of any kind whatsoever which would require to be replaced by importations by the American Committee for Belgian Relief.'‡

The period for which this promise would be maintained was not specified. Von Bissing's letter, however, made it clear that, whatever the intentions of the Germans had been in December, they had decided in March to limit the promise to stocks existing at the time the promise was given.

The Commission knew very well, however, that it would be quite impossible for it to continue its work unless the promise as first verbally given to Gerard should be strictly adhered to by the Germans.

The attitude of the Allied Governments.—The position of the Allies, and especially the British Government, was very definite on this point. In a letter of April 6, Lord Eustace Percy declared to Hoover that: 'We really must insist that in Belgium the Germans shall scrupulously respect the produce of the next harvest. Any attempt on the part of the Germans to go back on or to restrict their undertaking not to requisition any more foodstuffs in Belgium, any attempt to get hold of the next harvest by indirect means, will lead us immediately to reconsider our whole attitude. We must be satisfied that the certainty of the continuance of your supplies does not enable the Germans to divert to their own use one ounce of the food which would otherwise be at the disposal of the civil population.'

\* Hoover to Ambassador Gerard, March 27, 1915.

† Gerard to the State Department, telegram No. 1,195, December 26, 1914.

‡ Zimmermann to Gerard, December 31, 1914 (No. 11 W.K. Be. 343. 107,002).

We must be satisfied of this, not only by guarantees given by the Germans, but by adequate supervision maintained by your own agents and facilitated by the German authorities. We have compromised on many points hitherto, but we can assent to no compromise on this point.'

Hoover makes representations to Berlin.—Therefore, not only in order to provide for the future financing of the Commission, but also to make it possible for it to continue its work through the coming winter, it was necessary to secure a new declaration of the German Government that the Belgian cereal crop would be reserved absolutely to the Belgian population. Representations were at once made to the German Government presenting the demands of the British and asking that the necessary guarantees be given. On May 1 Hoover wrote again to Gerard, stating that he had just been informed by the allied governments that if the Germans did not agree to leave to the Belgians their harvest, the Commission would be required to discontinue its work on August 15.

'If the Germans would like to keep this Commission alive . . . it is positively essential that they should make at once a broad and sufficient undertaking with regard to the whole of the foodstuffs produced within the occupation zone. If we are to go on after the harvest, we have also got to make some sort of definite arrangements for our support. If the German Government would comply with our request for a definite and broad undertaking with regard to the protection of the native food-supplies during the whole of their occupation, I am satisfied that we can create some kind of a financial institution and float a loan on the security of the Belgian provinces. We should not in this event require any direct assistance from the German Government, but I feel at any rate that the whole future of the business now depends upon whether the German Government will enter into such undertakings with regard to the native production.'

The threat of the Foreign Office.—On May 4 Lord Eustace Percy wrote to Hoover repeating his demand of April 6. He continued: 'Some time has passed and I hear nothing further from you. Meanwhile we have been allowing you to send seed into Belgium, in the belief that the harvest when it comes will be used exclusively for the civil population whom you have so narrowly saved from starvation during all these months. We cannot wait much longer for a satisfactory declaration of the attitude of the German authorities. It is self-evident to me, and must be equally so to you, that your work will, in all probability, have to stop when the harvest matures, about the middle of August, unless positive guarantees are forthcoming from the German authorities that they will scrupulously respect and abstain from requisitioning the harvest in all the areas where your work is going on. . . . I sincerely trust that you will be able to inform me very soon, at any rate before the end of the month, that you have obtained the necessary guarantees from the German authorities.'

This declaration of the British Foreign Office was conveyed to the Imperial Government in Berlin in a letter written by Ambassador Gerard to the Foreign Secretary, von Jagow, on May 5, in which the facts stated in Hoover's letter were set forth. An answer from the German Government was delayed because of the diplomatic tension that arose as a result of the sinking of the 'Lusitania.' All other diplomatic negotiations were for a time laid aside, and the question of the Belgian harvest had to wait until it became certain that there would be no immediate rupture of diplomatic relations between the United States and Germany.

The attitude of the Comité National.—In the meantime the news that the Commission might be compelled to discontinue its work on August 15 had occasioned the



greatest uncasiness in Belgium. The people had come to recognise that their daily bread had in fact depended upon the importations of the Commission, and even the rumour that the Commission might be forced to dissolve led to considerable consternation. Some of the leading members of the Comité National rebelled against the allied attitude. Francqui declared that the British Government had given to them a general undertaking permitting the import of foodstuffs into Belgium so long as the Germans lived up to their guarantees to respect these foodstuffs. According to this view this undertaking was of unlimited character and not dependent on the promise of the Germans not to requisition native produce. Lord Eustace Percy refused, however, to agree to this interpretation. The only undertaking given by the British was, he said, that contained in a letter of October 22, from Sir Edward Grey to M. Berryer, stating that the British would not interfere with the Commission's shipments. He further declared in a letter of May 26, to Hoover, that: 'There is no bluff about our action, as we are in deadly earnest about stopping the whole arrangement if the necessary guarantee is not given.'

He regretted that the Belgians were rebellious at the British attitude, because he thought they should realise that the Foreign Office was putting up a fight to preserve their harvest for them. 'The whole value of our attitude as a means to putting pressure on the Germans will be compromised if the Comité National regard us as hard-hearted tyrants instead of backing up our attitude with what influence they have in Belgium.'

**Hoover decides to Intervene Personally.**—As no answer was forthcoming from the Germans in regard to the guarantees asked for, Hoover finally decided to go himself to Berlin and to Brussels to fight the matter out in personal interviews. The 'Lusitania' incident produced so grave a crisis that he resolved to postpone his trip until the diplomatic sky had somewhat cleared. But, as he wrote to Whitlock on May 26: 'On two successive occasions where vital matters have been at stake an entire change has been obtained by me through intervention in Berlin, and, as the National Committee has failed in the matter of the next harvest, I presume that this course will have to be pursued again if the stream of foodstuffs is to be kept flowing.'

#### THE GERMAN CROP GUARANTEE OF 1915

Negotiations started to protect the 1915 Crop.—Before going to Brussels, Hoover, according to his custom, endeavoured to bring all possible pressure to bear upon the German Government. Ambassador Gerard had already communicated to the German Foreign Office the attitude of the allied governments in regard to the new Belgian harvest. On June 1 Hoover cabled to the New York office asking Bates to inform certain influential Germans in America that the whole work of the Commission would come to an early end unless the Germans continued the undertaking they had given in December not to requisition Belgian produce. Both the Imperial Government in Berlin and the army headquarters at Charleville were apparently finally convinced of the seriousness of the situation and of the sincerity of the position taken by the British Foreign Office. It is of course impossible to know exactly what went on between the various German authorities. When Hoover arrived in Brussels, however, he found that the Governor-General had come to take a much more conciliatory attitude; Minister Whitlock informed Hoover that the Governor-General had assured him that he was prepared to agree in principle that the harvest should be utilised to feed the Belgian civil population. Even though the main point was conceded, the details

and actual extent of the guarantees had yet to be worked out, and, as usual in negotiating with the Germans, this was the most difficult part of the undertaking.

**The Demands of the Commission.**—Hoover formulated the demands of the Commission and, in a memorandum of June 15, communicated these to the American Minister. In this memorandum the Belgian harvest was divided into three categories. The first referred to articles such as bacon, lard, peas, beans, rice and maize, of which the production in Belgium was insignificant, and which must be supplied to the population by regular importations of the Commission during the whole duration of the war. The second category was that of wheat and other cereals of which sufficient was produced in Belgium to supply the population for approximately three months. In the third group were potatoes and other vegetables which Belgium produces in sufficient quantity to provide for the population for the whole year. According to Hoover, the first group of articles should be continuously imported by the Commission, while the third group did not concern the Commission at all, since the crop would be sufficient for the needs of the population. The articles in the second category, that is cereals, used in bread-making, were produced in varying quantities in the different provinces. Some districts would have a sufficient harvest to supply all their needs, others to supply only part of their needs, the rest of which would have to be provided by the Commission, and finally towns such as Brussels and Antwerp would have to be entirely provisioned by imports even during the harvest. Hoover proposed that, in the system to be adopted for utilising the cereal harvests, the cereals should be stored in as few centres as possible, and that the harvest should be equalised as between the provinces and distributed to the whole population along with the imported wheat. In this way the consumption of the harvest could be prolonged for a considerable period and a great deal of unnecessary transportation would be avoided.

**The Memorandum presented to von Bissing.**—On June 18 Mr. Hoover drew up a memorandum, which was presented by the American Minister to Baron von der Lancken, embodying the agreement which the Commission wished to effect with the German authorities. In this memorandum it was stated that the Comité National and the Commission for Relief in Belgium would continue to import until the harvest of 1916 the necessary materials for the feeding of the civil population of the occupied territory under the jurisdiction of the Governor-General in Belgium, who, on his side, should agree ‘to leave at the disposal of the Belgian civil population the produce of the harvest of grain of 1915 that could be utilised for bread-making (wheat and rye).’ In addition, the Governor-General should notify his decision as to the method of controlling the harvest to the Ministers of Spain and the United States and the Charge d’Affaires of the Netherlands for transmission to the Comité National and the Commission for Relief in Belgium.

**The Germans Yield.**—A week later, on June 25, Whitlock was able to inform Hoover that the German authorities had assented to the wishes of the Commission and had signed a memorandum practically identical to that drawn up by Hoover. Whitlock said that the formal announcement would be made in a few days as soon as certain details had been arranged with the Comité National. The memorandum of the German authorities was as follows :—

‘The Governor-General in Belgium will hold at the disposition of the Belgian civil population of the territory placed under his orders the 1915 harvest of grain utilisable for the making of bread (wheat and rye). On their side, the Comité National and the “Commission for Relief in Belgium,” under the patronage of the Ministers of Spain and United

States of America and the Netherlands, will continue to import into Belgium approximately equal monthly quantities, until the harvest of 1916, of the commodities necessary for the provision of the civil population in the occupied territory placed under the orders of the Governor-General in Belgium. As soon as the Governor-General will have taken a decision with regard to the distribution of the 1915 harvest of grain mentioned above, this decision will be brought to the knowledge of the protecting Ministers.'

Thus once again the German Government had yielded to pressure and to the representations of the Commission and had agreed to reserve for the Belgian civil population the most important part of the Belgian harvest. Mr. Hoover on his return to London was able to inform Lord Eustace Percy of this concession on the part of the Germans and to set about drawing up plans for the continuation of the Commission's work.

On June 30 Hoover wrote Lord Eustace Percy that General von Bissing's undertaking would be formally communicated to the Foreign Office by the American Ambassador in a few days, together with a request on the part of the German Government that the British Government should give an undertaking that this Commission would not be interfered with during the next year in its efforts to provision the people of Belgium. Hoover explained that such an undertaking was necessary to the Commission before it could agree with the Germans to continue imports, and suggested the form of such an undertaking.

**The Foreign Office Statement of July 7, 1915.**—As soon as the formal notification of von Bissing's guarantee had been received through the American Ambassador, the Foreign Office issued a long statement on July 7, in regard to the work of the Commission, in the form of a letter from the Marquis of Crewe to the American and Spanish Ambassadors.

In this letter it was stated that General von Bissing's undertaking seemed to have been made subject to an assurance from the Commission, and consequently from the allied governments, that the Commission should continue to import regular monthly quantities of foodstuffs until the harvest of 1916. 'His Majesty's Government are prepared to give this assurance, but they must give it subject to certain conditions necessitated by the experience of the last eight months.' The letter then reviewed the various negotiations with the Germans for the purpose of protecting Belgian products, and pointed out that the scarcity of foodstuffs in Belgium was deliberately increased by the German Government through requisitions of Belgian food. The letter recalled the promise of the Germans to cease these requisitions which had been subsequently altered in such a way as to exclude from requisition only a small list of articles. The British Government therefore maintained that the German authorities had taken advantage of the labours of the Commission to deprive the Belgian people of their native resources. 'The German Government has, by this action and by the whole attitude they have assumed, shown their determination to divest themselves of all responsibility for the population whose territory they have occupied, and to leave that population to the exclusive care of their own rightful government, its allies and the neutral world. Taking full account of this attitude His Majesty's Government have been obliged to stipulate, and now wish to stipulate even more clearly, that the feeding and maintenance of the civil population of Belgium shall be absolutely divided from the feeding and maintenance of the occupying army; and His Majesty's Government have only sanctioned, and will only sanction, the work of the Commission on the distinct understanding that this division is maintained—that is to say, that the Commission gives a complete guarantee that the foodstuffs for which it is responsible could not go, in any way, directly or indirectly, to any person connected with the occupying army or the

German civil administration, and that the relief distribution by it is not in any way taken advantage of by the army or the administration for their own ends. This rigorous distinction must be maintained, and it follows, as a condition precedent to any assurances such as the Commission now asks for, that the Commission and the Comité National shall obtain and continue at all times to enjoy the freedom of action corresponding to their independent responsibility for the feeding and maintenance of the civil population.'

The British Government also expressly stipulated that the relief work should not be utilised in any way by the Germans to coerce the working population of Belgium into labouring for the Germans, and stated that in case of such use of the relief work all arrangements between the British Government and the Commission must at once terminate.

In his letter the Marquis of Crewe stated that 'His Majesty's Government would give an assurance to the Commission that it would continue to give permits for the passage of Commission's imports into Belgium with the following stipulations:—

**The stipulations of the Foreign Office.—1.** 'That the purchase and distribution of the harvest in Belgium shall be under the management of the Commission for Relief in Belgium and the Comité National, in the same manner as the imported foodstuffs, and that the Commission for Relief in Belgium and the Comité National shall continue to administer relief in kind to the destitute as heretofore. Any agreement entered into by and any regulations imposed upon the Commission or the Comité National with regard to their activities, whether in relation to the harvest or in relation to any other matter, shall be submitted to His Majesty's Government by the Commission for their approval, before a conclusion of such an agreement or the acceptance of such regulations.

2. 'With regard to articles other than wheat or rye, His Majesty's Government cannot of course give any undertaking; and they will not permit the Commission to introduce any such articles into Belgium until an undertaking is given in regard to them by the German authorities similar to that now given in regard to wheat and rye. As, however, the Commission assures His Majesty's Government that the articles of food which it desires to import will in practice not form the object of requisitions in Belgium, His Majesty's Government are prepared on that understanding to allow the Commission from time to time to import these articles, viz.: peas, beans, rice, bacon, lard and maize (for human consumption) so long as the import of these articles does not represent the replacement of other articles requisitioned by the Germans.

3. 'His Majesty's Government, having to complain of constant and flagrant violation by the German Government of their undertakings to respect British ships carrying Commission's foodstuffs to Rotterdam, they must insist that any further attack made on such vessels will relieve them from all obligations under the present arrangement.'

In concluding the letter it was stated that: 'It is, of course, understood that the present assurances given to the Commission by His Majesty's Government and by the German Government had not superseded, but on the contrary supplemented and formed an integral part of the previous assurances and guarantees given by either Government.'

**The German Reply.**—This note of the British Foreign Office was in due form transmitted through the American and Spanish diplomats to the German Government. In a letter of July 16, addressed to Baron von der Lancken, the American and Spanish Ministers at Brussels stated the conditions upon which the British Government would grant an assurance that it would not interfere with the Commission's activities. The stipulations in the letter from the Marquis of Crewe were given in practically their original form. After

some discussion the Governor-General agreed to accept the stipulations, and in a letter of July 29, to the protecting Ministers in Brussels, the Baron von der Lancken gave a detailed confirmation of the various guarantees asked for.

The Governor-General agreed to the various principles involved, viz. : That the provision and up-keep of the Belgian civil population would continue to be kept apart from the provisioning and upkeep of the German army, and that the undertakings made by the Governor-General would be adhered to at all points ; that the Belgian civil population would alone enjoy the advantage of the relief distributed by the Comité National, and that the Comité National and C.R.B. would continue to enjoy the liberty of action necessary to the fulfilment of the mission which had devolved upon them through the agreement between the Governor-General and the representatives of the neutral Powers ; that the Governor-General would not at any time make use of the Comité National to force the Belgian working population to employment for the benefit of the German army, contrary to the stipulations of The Hague conventions ; that the Comité National would make the purchases of the harvest of cereals in the territory under the orders of the Governor-General, that the distribution of these cereals would be under the control of the said committee in the same manner as in the case of the distribution of imported goods ; that, at the same time, the committee would continue to distribute relief in kind to the destitute, under the conditions agreed to in previous undertakings between the Governor-General and the protecting Ministers.

Von der Lancken concluded his letter by stating that he confirmed in the name of the Governor-General all assurances and guarantees formerly given. 'I have communicated to the Governor-General the assurances that the work patronised by your Excellency will continue its beneficent activity under the conditions of such strict neutrality as will justify the aid and protection of the Governor-General and the authorities under his control, which they have never failed to give to this institution since its creation.'

**Problems of the Commission.**—The two letters that have been quoted here at such length, that is, the communication of the Foreign Office of July 7, and von der Lancken's assurances of July 29, settled for the time being the various diplomatic difficulties that had threatened to put an end to the work of the Commission, and provided the basis for the continuation for the Commission's work during the second winter of the war. There still remained for settlement the many difficult problems with regard to the administration of relief work in Belgium and Northern France which had arisen during the first period of the Commission's work. Certain rather serious disagreements had grown up between the Commission and the Comité National. The manner of distribution of the Belgian cereal crop had to be definitely agreed upon. In order to reach a definite settlement of outstanding questions, Hoover decided to go again to Brussels in July. This he did about the middle of the month, in company with John B. White and Edgar Rickard of the London office. The conferences which they held there and the agreement which they reached with the Comité National will be described in the next chapter. It only remains to add at this point, to make complete the account of the crop agreement of 1915, a description of the method which was devised for the control, purchase and distribution of the harvest of wheat and rye in Belgium.

## THE CENTRAL CROP COMMISSION

Von Bissing's decree relating to the 1915 Harvest.—The first decree of the Governor-General, designed to carry into effect his guarantee relative to the new crop, was published in the official bulletin on July 5, 1915, but was dated June 30. This decree provided that all cereals used for the making of bread were to be reserved exclusively to the population; that in order to accomplish this end, all such cereals would be seized under the authority of the General Government and held to be disposed of by a special commission which could be appointed to supervise the distribution to the population. All commerce in cereals was forbidden. The farmers were enjoined to properly harvest such crops and to hold them until instructed as to the place and conditions of delivery to the commission.

After the issuance of this order, officials of the General Government held many conferences with the members of the executive committee of the Comité National and with the director of the Commission to work out the details of the machinery necessary for the control and distribution of the crop. The British Foreign Office had required, in the letter of July 7, that the native crop should be controlled by the Commission and the Comité National in the same way as imported foods. The conferences were therefore occupied with working out a scheme that would satisfy the British Government and that would, at the same time, be acceptable to the Germans. Mr. Hoover was consulted about the matter during his visit to Brussels about July 20. A decree was finally issued by the Governor-General putting into effect the arrangements that were agreed upon.

The decree creating the Central Crop Commission.—This new decree was published in the official bulletin on August 3, under the date of July 23. It provided that Article 6 of the decree of June 30, which referred to the Commission for controlling the crop, should be modified in the manner described in the nine articles of the new decree. Article 1 provided that the Comité National should have the exclusive right to purchase against cash payment the new cereal crop and the remainders of any stocks from previous harvests. The purchase would be made at a uniform price to be fixed by the Governor-General. Article 2 provided that a central crop commission should be established at Brussels and a provincial crop commission in the chief place of each province, to carry out the provisions of the decree. Article 3 provided that the central crop commission should be under the immediate orders of the Governor-General. Its president and its members would be nominated by the Governor-General. The president would be a representative of the General Government. As members there were to be a representative of the German civil administration, who would be vice-president, and one representative from the political department, the General Commissioner of Banks, the Military Intendance of the General Government. There were also to be representatives of the Comité National and of 'the Commission for Relief' sitting as members. The deliberations of these commissions were to be in the German language. Article 4 described the composition of the provincial crop commissions. Three members of each were to be representatives of the German authority; three were to be appointed by Belgian organisations. Article 5 provided that the central crop commission should determine the quantities of grain to be released for distribution to the population and should make sure that, after allowance had been made of the quantity necessary for seed, the monthly consumption should not be in excess of one-twelfth of the crop of 1915; it should also submit to the Governor-General

the necessary proposals as to the uniform ration to be established, as to the purchase price of the cereals, as to milling, and as to maximum prices for the sale of grain, flour, bran and bread. The central crop commission should instruct the provincial commissions as to the measures necessary to be taken. The provincial commission was to release monthly the seized grain to the Comité National, or the provincial committees, on the basis of the statistics which they should draw up ; they should watch over provincial stocks, control sale prices, and in general supervise the operations of the special offices which the Comité National would create in each province for the purchase and distribution of the crop of that province. Article 6 conferred upon the provincial crop commission authority to perform the functions just enumerated. Article 7 provided sanctions against violations of the decrees relating to the harvest, maximum penalties of five years' imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 marks being provided ; cases of violations were to be tried by the German military courts. Article 8 specified that this decree did not apply to barle. They last article stated that in case of necessity the General Government would publish new ordinances relative to the application of this decree.

These decrees were made to apply by later legislation to the French districts of Maubeuge and Givet-Fumay as well as to the Belgian part of the General Government. They did not apply, however, to the part of Belgium in the etappen district.

Decrees relating to the Harvest of Barley, Oats and Hay.—At about the same time as these decrees were issued the Governor-General also provided, by a special decree, for the seizure of the harvest of barley and oats. By a decree of July 20 a barley commission was established composed of two representatives of the German Government, one representative of the Belgian Ministry of Agriculture, one representative of the Belgian Brewers Federation, one representative of the 'Yeast Manufacturers,' one representative of the Belgian Grain Dealers, and a member of the Council of Agriculture. Just as in the case of the central crop commission, sub-commissions were to be established in all the provinces. The provincial committees were to operate through district committees, each of which would control the stocks of barley in their district. These commissions were to supervise the distribution of the harvest and were to make sure that the whole crop of barley was disposed of in the manner provided for by the decree.

A similar decree, of July 27, provided for the seizure of the whole crop of oats in the Belgian territory under the orders of the Governor-General. In this case, however, the crop was to be delivered to the military authorities ; the farmer was allowed to reserve for his own use 170 kilogrammes per hectare for seed, and 920 kilogrammes per horse, to provide food for a period of one year.

A decree of August 6 provided for the seizure of the hay crop for the benefit of the military administration. Every farmer was permitted, however, to keep for himself such quantities of hay as were necessary for the feeding of his own animals.

It can be seen thus that the policy of the General Government was very different in the case of the cereals used principally for human consumption from that followed in the case of food for animals. Wheat, rye and barley were reserved for the use of the civil population ; oats and hay were requisitioned for the benefit of the army. It was for this reason that the British Government thereafter resolutely refused to permit the Commission to introduce fodder of any kind into Belgium. It was expressly stipulated in the case of maize that the quantities imported were to be used exclusively for human consumption.

**The 'Centrale' System.**—The decrees relating to the establishment of the central

crop commission and the barley commission are specially interesting because they mark the beginning of a policy which the Germans later greatly extended in dealing with many other articles of Belgian production. They were the first examples of the 'centrales.' It seemed to be a habit of the Germans, whenever a shortage of any article was threatened, to centralise all the existing stocks and put them under the control of a special commission. These commissions were usually known as 'centrales' (or, in German, Zentrales). Thus there came to be an oil centrale, a butter centrale, a sugar centrale, a potato centrale, a vegetable centrale, a brandy centrale, and a chicory centrale, each for the purpose of centralising and controlling the distribution of the article concerned. These centrales will be dealt with later on in a chapter devoted to the work of inspection and control carried on by the Commission.

The central crop commission went to work in the month of August. They drew up immediately their regulations to govern the distribution of the cereal harvest. It was provided that all cereal producers would be permitted to hold for their own use the quantities of grain necessary to provide their bread ration for the year. They would not, however, be entitled to receive any flour ration whatsoever from the Commission or the Comité National. As a result of this measure, it was estimated that 1,250,000 people were stricken from the ration list on September 15, 1915, because they formed the agricultural class which was allowed to retain its own breadstuffs. This reduced the population in the occupied territory dependent on the Comité National and the Commission for its bread to approximately 4,500,000.

**The operations of the Central Crop Commission.**—The total wheat supplies reported to the central crop commission as being available for distribution through the Comité National was reported on November 16, 1915, to be 202,000 metric tons. According to the regulations, one-fifteenth of this was to be turned over each month by the crop commission to the Comité National. Due to the difficulty in getting the statistics of the crop completed, only 6,000 tons were turned over to the Comité National in the two months from September 15 to November 15, 1915. The president of the harvest commission declared that the quantity of approximately 21,000 tons, which was not delivered as agreed during this period, would be held by the crop commission as a reserve to be delivered to the Comité National when the crop commission considered it advisable. The Comité National and the Commission formally protested against this failure to deliver promptly the proportion of the harvest agreed upon, declaring that the German Government had contracted a formal obligation to deliver these quantities. Thereafter the deliveries to the Comité National were made with fair regularity and it was able to deliver without interruption the bread ration to the 4,500,000 people dependent upon it. The quantity of cereal provided by the Belgian harvest and released by the central crop commission was only 13,450 tons monthly, or less than one-fourth of the quantity necessary to maintain the bread ration, and it was therefore necessary for the Commission to continue to import 54,000 tons monthly.

#### THE HARVEST IN THE BELGIAN ETAPPEN REGION AND IN NORTHERN FRANCE

**The Harvest outside the 'Occupied' Area of Belgium.**—The whole of the negotiations referred to in the previous sections of this chapter, related only to the crop in the 'occupied' district under the direct jurisdiction of the Governor-General. The Germans



formally refused to give any guarantees whatsoever to protect the crop in the Belgian *etappen* district and in the occupied portions of France from requisitions. This naturally was objected to very strongly by the allied governments. The agreement by which the Commission was permitted to extend its work into Northern France expired with the arrival of the new harvest. The Commission, therefore, had to secure from the allied governments a new permission for the continuation of its work in the Flanders and in Northern France. On September 14, 1915, Hoover wrote to Mr. Crosby, director of the Commission at Brussels, urging the necessity of securing from the general staff some guarantees as to the crops in the occupied countries outside the district of the General Government. 'In taking up the continuation of our work after the harvest, we have met with great opposition to our application for blockade permits from the governments involved; these governments contend that the civil population has the first right to the harvest and that only the surplus left after the entire requirements of the civilians are satisfied can be lawfully taken by the German authorities, and that the harvest in Northern France suffices for the requirements of the civil population.'\*

**The German Agreements.**—Mr. Hoover, when in Brussels in July, had made a visit to the headquarters at Charleville where Professor Vernon Kellogg was then stationed as chief representative for Northern France. After some discussion with Major von Kessler of the general staff of the whole question of the French crop, Hoover was assured that the German army would turn over to the civil population 100 grammes of flour *per capita per diem*, on the condition that the Commission should supply an additional 150 grammes of flour per day and should continue to supply the usual ration of rice, lard and bacon, and the other commodities previously distributed in France. The Germans would themselves requisition the entire harvest, but agreed to resell without profit to the French committees a quantity equal to 100 grammes per day for the entire population for a period of six months. The Germans likewise agreed that they would deliver to the population 200 grammes of potatoes per day per person. After Mr. Hoover's departure Mr. Crosby and Professor Kellogg continued the negotiations with headquarters, and finally secured an order from the general intendant of the German army on August 23 providing for the delivery to the population of the occupied French district of 100 grammes of flour per day and per person from the German stocks. This ration was to be in wheat flour and not in rye flour. The distribution was to be based on statistics made by the officers assigned to work with the American delegates. The stocks, when once distributed, were to enjoy the same protection as the foods imported by the Commission. The French committees were to pay for this flour in currency. In order to permit the French to secure a sufficient amount of currency, the Germans agreed to pay for a proportion of the crop requisition in currency. This agreement was to apply not only to the French districts but also to the Belgian *etappen* districts.

The supplementary order, providing for the distribution of potatoes to the population, was issued by the general intendant of the army on September 3. This provided for the distribution of 200 grammes per day per person for six months under practically the same conditions as obtained in the case of the deliveries of flour. †

**Protests of the Allies.**—When Mr. Hoover was negotiating in September to assure

\* Hoover to Crosby, September 14, 1915.

† These orders are reprinted in the Commission's North of France report (April 1, 1915—December 31, 1916).

financial support to the Commission for the ensuing year, he found considerable difficulty because of reports received by the allied governments that the Germans were not fulfilling the assurances they had given in regard to Northern France and the Flanders. Especially, it was said, that there was a great lack of uniformity in the carrying out of the agreement that the crop in France would be requisitioned against payment in cash in order to permit the French committees to buy back the quantities the Germans had agreed to deliver them. In Hoover's letter, referred to above, he stated that he understood that no such payments had ever been made in currency for the harvest. He wrote Crosby: 'I trust that you will take this matter up at once with the general staff and see that they interest themselves in straightening it out. The matter is one of the most serious importance to the whole of this relief work, because the Commission is cutting through belligerent lines and is carrying on relations with belligerent governments, who can make no direct undertakings; hence the whole foundation of our work depends upon our being able to maintain a good face with both belligerents in every assurance which I gave on either side.'

In another letter of the same date to Crosby, Hoover stated that the allied governments had objected to the German agreement in so far as it affected Flanders, because 'they considered it the duty of the occupying army to set aside from the harvest complete provision for the civil population and their animals. As no provision has been made for animals and only a partial one for humans in this region, they cannot allow us to continue imports into that section. They contend such imports amount to provisioning the German army by virtue of the replacement of foodstuffs which have been requisitioned from the population. Whether these contentions are right or wrong, the fact stares us in the face that the ravitaillement of this section is in danger of breaking down.' \*

**Hoover's Proposals.**—Hoover suggested that the Germans in the Flanders should agree to hand over the entire wheat harvest to the civil population, and should permit the population to reserve sufficient quantities of rye, oats and hay to feed their animals during winter. Crosby forwarded Hoover's letter to Count von Wengersky, an officer of the general quartermaster's department who was in general supervision of the whole work of provisionment outside the territory of the General Government in Belgium. Crosby pointed out that the wheat harvest in Flanders would only amount to about 120,000 tons; that the distribution promised to the population would absorb 70,000 or 80,000 tons; and that therefore the German authorities at most would only secure 40,000 or 50,000 tons of wheat. Crosby stated also that if the wheat were to be turned over as Mr. Hoover suggested, the Commission would still have to send 100,000 tons of wheat into the Flanders, and, in addition, large amounts of rice, bacon, lard, etc., which it was prevented from doing at the time by the attitude of the allied governments. Crosby therefore asked Count von Wengersky to take up the question with the general staff.

**The German Counter-Proposals.**—After some negotiation the German authorities agreed to make certain concessions in the matter of food for the animals, but refused to turn over the whole crop of cereals to the civil population. The arrangements proposed by the Germans for the Flanders were summed up in a memorandum made at the end of September by Oberleutnant Schroeder, the officer assigned by general headquarters to supervise the relief work in the Flanders. The German authorities would deliver 120 grammes of wheat per day and per person to the population of Flanders. The farmers could retain

\* Hoover to Crosby, September 14, 1915.

sufficient quantities of oats and hay to feed their own animals for one year. Cereals such as maize and barley would not be requisitioned and could be used or disposed of freely by the producers but could not be exported from the etappen region. The potato harvest would not be seized but would be left entirely to the civil population, with the proviso also that it should not be exported from the etappen region. These arrangements were communicated to Hoover in London by Mr. Crosby in a letter of September 29. Before the letter was received, however, the British Foreign Office had taken a definite stand and made conditions which were not satisfied by the concessions mentioned in Schroeder's note.

**The demand of the Foreign Office.**— Lord Eustace Percy, writing on September 30 to Hoover, stated that he had read Hoover's letter of September 14 in regard to the harvest in the zone of operations in the Flanders and in Northern France, and went on to say 'that the minimum concession acceptable to the British would be that the whole wheat harvest should be handed over to the civil population and that they should be permitted to reserve sufficient animal food for their own stock.

'When you have obtained a binding engagement to this effect, we shall be prepared to arrange for the continuation of your work, but if you cannot inform us on your return from Belgium that the German military authorities have acceded to you this measure of justice, I think we shall probably feel obliged to require you to import no more foodstuffs into the area of Belgium under military administration.'

In regard to Northern France, Lord Eustace said that Hoover had asked very little, 'only that the German authorities shall resell to the population, for the same price at which it was bought and in the same currency, an amount of breadstuffs equivalent to 100 grammes of flour *per capita per diem* for the next twelve months.'

Lord Eustace objected strenuously to admitting that the Germans had any right to seize the food products of France, referred to the forced labour to which the Germans subjected the population in France, and complained of the excesses of the German army in France. 'Neither we nor the civilised world, when these facts are published, could possibly recognise the claim of the German army to any portion of the harvest in Northern France. I recognise, however, that the demand you have made, though less than our requirements, is as much as can be expected from an army totally indifferent to the fate of the population whose territory it occupies; but your modest demand is, I am sure, the very least we can think of accepting, and, if it is not immediately complied with, we shall have to reconsider our whole attitude towards the provisionment of France. I must make clear to you the implication of this demand: no part of the harvest must be made the means of any coercion or any impositions on the population in any shape or form; that inadequate part of the harvest which the Germans guarantee to the population must be delivered to them as their right, and the delivery must be coupled with no conditions on the part of the German army.' \*

Upon receiving this letter Mr. Hoover realised that a situation had arisen once again which required his personal intervention in Belgium. Other serious difficulties had arisen at the same time both with the Germans and with the Comité National, and he decided, therefore, that he would be compelled to take a trip to Brussels to attempt, among other things, to obtain the assurances demanded in Lord Eustace Percy's letter.

Negotiations relative to the Harvest in Flanders.— While in Brussels Mr. Hoover

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\* Lord Eustace Percy to Hoover, September 30, 1916.

went to Ghent and had a conference with the competent authorities in the etappen inspection. He stated quite plainly the attitude which the British Foreign Office had taken toward the question of requisitions in Flanders and said that he was convinced that the British would not yield the point. The Germans, after attempting to make various counter proposals, finally yielded to Mr. Hoover's arguments and agreed that the whole crop of wheat in the Flanders should be reserved for the civil population of that area. This agreement was confirmed in a letter written to the Commission, on October 7, by Lieutenant-Colonel Ostertag, the chief of the general staff of the etappen inspection. In this he confirmed the promise 'that the whole of the wheat crop of the territory was to be liberated for the civil population. The entire wheat crop has been estimated to amount to only about 40,000 tons. In order to give the civil population 120 grammes of wheat *per capita* and per day for one year, about 70,000 tons will be required. Efforts will be made to bring the 30,000 tons, lacking from the native crop, from other territories. Where this is impossible the missing quantity will be supplied from Belgian rye. Deliveries will be made for periods of three months. The quantities left to the communes may be collected by the local members of the Comité National and stored in the magazine of the C.R.B. The remainder of the rye crop will be requisitioned by the German military authorities against cash payment at the rate of 24 marks per 100 kilogrammes. The oat and hay crops have been requisitioned, but 1.50 kilogrammes of oats per head of stock per day will be left for the farmers for their own use. Owners of horses will be allowed to purchase from the farmers at a fixed maximum price. Other fodder materials, such as maize, barley, straw, bran, mangel-wurzel, turnips and similar vegetables have been freed from requisition, but may not be exported from the etappen region; the same applies to the potato crop.'

On his return to London, Hoover wrote Lord Eustace Percy, on October 11, reporting the results of his negotiations and enclosing a copy of Ostertag's letter. He commented: 'The arrangements appear to me to be on the whole satisfactory, for these unsatisfactory times, and they are on the whole better than the arrangements made in the occupation zone, and represent the absolute maximum which we are able to obtain. I trust this will be satisfactory to you and that we may, beside the usual food, also import fodder into that area for the town animals.'

**The Foreign Office accepts the Agreement.**—The arrangement made by Hoover was accepted by the Foreign Office, which gave its permission for the continuation of the Commission's shipments to the Flanders.

In a letter of October 21 to the Commission, Lord Eustace Percy said: 'We will not ask the Commission to make any further demands in regard to the disposal of the native crops in the etappen-gebiet in Belgium, though we are not of course satisfied with the concessions made by the German administration and cannot possibly admit the justice of the German claim to the whole or portions of the rye, oats and hay crops. But, while not asking you to make any further demands, we take note of the undertakings made by the German administration and shall expect them to be strictly observed.'

Thus the question of the use of the crop of 1915 was settled in Flanders. The long series of negotiations to protect indigenous crops, begun in March, was successfully terminated. The Commission had succeeded in getting assurances from the Germans that the whole of the cereals used in bread-making produced in the occupation district would be reserved to the civil population alone; that the wheat crop in Flanders would similarly be reserved for the use of the population, and that the German army would guarantee to

deliver 120 grammes of wheat per day and per person in the Belgian etappen district ; in France the population were assured from the local production 100 grammes of flour and 200 grammes of potatoes per person per day.

The significance of the Commission's success in securing Protection of the Harvest.— In a way it was one of the most signal triumphs of the Commission, that so great concessions should have been rung from a hard-pressed belligerent which was itself beginning to feel the effects of the blockade and the consequent food shortage. At many stages of the negotiations it had seemed that affairs had come to an impasse and that no compromise could be secured between the irreconcilable attitudes of Germany and England, but the Commission and, principally, its chief, Herbert Hoover, always found at the critical moment some compromise solution or some way of bringing special pressure to bear to compel concessions. These concessions secured from the Germans provided a considerable supply of food for the population of the occupied territories in Belgium and in France ; more than that, they fulfilled the conditions imposed by the Allies as a pre-requisite to the continuation of food shipments to Belgium. As a result of his negotiations, Hoover was not only able to continue to demand import permits, but was also able to successfully petition for the increased governmental subsidies made necessary to buy the food for Belgium and Northern France as a result of the rising prices and the increase in the rations.

It might have seemed that the Commission could well have rested on its oars after its successful efforts to secure guarantees protecting the native products, but, in reality, only one stage of negotiations had been finished. In a very few months the whole question of the reservation of Belgian produce to the civil population of the occupied territory was to come up again in a more aggravated form than ever and the Commission was to be plunged again into most delicate negotiations. But that is another story and will be told in another place.

## CHAPTER VIII

## THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION IN BELGIUM IN 1915

## PROBLEMS OF ORGANISATION

The Commission's Organisation in Belgium.—The preliminary organisation of the work of the Commission in Belgium has already been described in Chapter III. In that place the problems which the organisation had to meet were discussed and an account was given of the development to the middle of January. By that time the Brussels office, having undergone three complete reorganisations in the course of six weeks, was at last established on a more or less permanent footing. Definite relations had been established with the American delegates in the provinces, who had thrown themselves unsparingly into the work from the moment of their arrival in their respective stations.

Captain Lucey's Administration.—Captain Lucey, who had planned and put into effect the new organisation of the Brussels office, was an enthusiastic and capable executive, insistent upon the securing of results, and impatient of delays and obstacles. He believed that the Americans should exercise the directing influence in the provinces, because he thought that only in that way could unity of purpose and efficiency of organisation be secured. He inaugurated fortnightly meetings of the delegates for the discussion of general questions concerned with food distribution and of the particular difficulties encountered by the delegates in the various provinces.

The Functions of the Provincial Delegates of the Commission.—During the time that he was in Brussels, two of these general meetings were held and there was a great deal of discussion on the various problems that had arisen. Very diverse opinions were expressed by the different delegates. The work had been organised independently in each of the provinces and each provincial organisation differed from the other. It was only natural therefore that the experience of the delegates and their opinion about the way the work should be carried on differed according to their individual experiences. In some instances, where the Belgian committees, for political or sectional reasons, were working at cross purposes, as at Liège and Antwerp, the delegates believed that efficiency could only be obtained and the regulations of the relief maintained if the American delegates were given the power to impose methods and rules on the Belgian committees. In other provinces, where the number of the population was very great and where complicated and definite rules were required to enforce an efficient administration, as in the Hainaut and in Brabant, the delegates also believed that the desired results could be obtained only if the American delegate was made a sort of general executive and superintendent of the work. Elsewhere, as in the Luxembourg, where the committees were already well organised and where relief operations had been carried on for a considerable period previous to the intervention of the Commission, the American delegates considered it advisable to let the organisation remain unchanged and to content themselves with a general supervision of the work.

**The Administrative Problem in Belgium.**—The problem was really not so much to establish an efficient organisation on model lines as to find a system of food distribution operating in a way which the Belgians understood and to which they were accustomed, and which could be administered without a too great degree of executive control and inspection. The situation of the country made it impossible to teach new business methods in a short while to a whole population. It seemed therefore that technical efficiency must be sacrificed in order to get the food to the people as quickly as possible. That was the chief aim, and the question of organisation, in the beginning, seemed relatively unimportant to the heads of the Commission's work. As it has been repeatedly stated, no one in the Commission probably realised that the work would continue for years. Consequently the necessity for the building up immediately of a model administrative organisation, with a complete system of checks and controls, was not realised. The whole work was begun as if it were to be merely a temporary expedient, and it was only later, when abuses and difficulties began to arise because of gaps in the temporary system put into effect at the beginning, that the Commission attempted to provide the complete control and the business efficiency necessary in operations of such scope and magnitude as those of the Commission.

**Mr. Connett's Administration.**—Captain Lucey left Belgium at the end of January and was succeeded in the directorship of the Brussels office by Mr. A. N. Connett, a well-known American engineer. Mr. Connett had a very different view of the situation than Captain Lucey. He had little of the patriotic pride in seeing the chief part in the work played by Americans that had characterised Captain Lucey's administration. He was a cool-headed administrator, inclined to adopt the expedients which seemed to best fit the situation. He was perhaps rather unfavourably impressed with the youth of the delegates in Belgium, most of whom at that time were still the Oxford volunteers. His attitude was that the Americans could not begin to administer effectively the food distribution in Belgium, that this work must needs be left to the Belgian committees, which were composed of the ablest men of the country and which were possessed of intimate knowledge of the situation. This attitude very soon found its expression in the instructions sent out to the delegates and in the general attitude of the Brussels office toward the provincial offices. Mr. Connett thought that the delegates should content themselves with being migratory inspectors of the work of the Belgian committees, but that the burden of the work itself, and the responsibility of that work, should be left to the Comité National and its sub-committees in the provinces and communes.

**New instructions to the American Delegates.**—Thus, on February 5, a new set of instructions was sent out by Connett to the provincial delegates, after having been approved by Minister Whitlock and the comité exécutif of the Comité National. These instructions provided that the local delegates 'should make sure that the supplies are distributed equally in the whole of their province. For this reason, the delegates should be authorised to make investigations of the methods adopted by the provincial, regional or communal committees. When difficulties are encountered in the food distribution, or when abuses are discovered, the delegate concerned is requested to make an examination, in company with the provincial committee, and to give the instructions, in accord with that committee, as to the measures to be taken to overcome the difficulties or remedy the abuses. In case an agreement cannot be reached, the provincial delegate should refer the matter to the central office at Brussels, which, with the Comité National, will decide what action is to be taken. The delegates

should do everything to avoid such an appeal, though they should not in any case deviate from our general principle that the distribution shall be just and equitable.'

It was then provided that each American delegate should assist at the meeting of the provincial committee in his province. The delegates were enjoined not to uselessly increase the task of the Belgian committees in charge of the distribution. They were assured, it is true, that it was their duty to control certain operations of the Belgian committees, both because of the obligations of the committee arising from the agreements on which its work was based, and as representatives of all the people who had made donations to the charitable funds of the Comité National through the C.R.B. The delegates were requested not to affix their signature to any proclamations or posters. These were to be gotten out by the Belgian committees, with the approval of the delegate, and should bear the signature only of the head of the provincial committee.

'In conclusion, the delegates should easily perceive from the present instructions that their rôle is that of an advisor and not of an administrator. They can and ought to provide against every measure contrary to the arrangements made by the C.R.B. They have full powers of investigation of the methods adopted and the means chosen to apply them. I am convinced that it is unnecessary to add that while they should fulfil their functions with all firmness, they ought also to show themselves tolerant and courteous in their attitude towards our collaborators who are occupied with so arduous a task.'

Mr. Connett's views on the organisation of the Relief Work.—The general attitude, indicated by these instructions, was maintained throughout Mr. Connett's administration in Brussels. He soon grew impatient with the attitude of some of the delegates and was frankly bored by the discussions at the delegates' meetings. After attending one, he decided that it was useless to hold any further meetings and no more were held during the time that he was in Belgium. Believing as he did that the decision of all important matters should be left to the Belgian committees, he saw no use in extended discussion of these matters by the American delegates. His attitude was very clearly expressed in a letter written on March 8 to Hoover in reply to a letter of Hoover's, enclosing a communication from Ambassador Page to the effect that the delegates in Belgium should be very numerous and should themselves maintain executive control over the relief operations. He said that on first reading the letter he intended to call the delegates together to give them instructions to carry out the additional functions necessitated, if they were to place themselves in more active control of the distribution. 'However, after a night's sleep and a frank talk with Mr. Francqui, I changed my mind. We both are confident that the Ambassador's letter was inspired in London Wall Buildings and not in Grosvenor Gardens.

The limitation of the Delegates' Powers.—'The right number of men in a province is one, but for the sake of companionship and the possibility of illness, the number should be two. More than that means idleness and mischief. We must not delude ourselves into the belief that young men, with no business experience and only a faint acquaintance with the language, can control the most experienced business men in the country. To put them in such a position would not be fair to the men, to the reputation of the C.R.B. and finally to our country.

'I wish to take this opportunity of stating that the Rhodes men have done wonderfully well; generally speaking, they are better than the men sent directly from the States. Their stay at Oxford has given them a poise that makes them better for an international undertaking than youths of a corresponding age coming directly from the States. . . . On



the point of provincial organisation I maintain that I am right. Do not let us put ourselves wrong with our Belgian friends. Dictation or direction by men not in the nature of things competent to exercise such powers would make a bad impression. My immediate predecessor here did a fine bit of work in putting the C.R.B. in the hands of the Americans whose nationality was not doubted. I flatter myself that this work so energetically commenced has been carried to complete success in my hands, but now that the organisation of the C.R.B. and of the provincial committees is so generally good, I suggest that the problem has become one of statics and not of dynamics.'

From February to April, therefore, the American delegates in the provinces, when they found themselves in a conflict of opinion or authority with Belgian committees, got scant comfort and less support at Brussels.

**The Results of the *laissez-faire* Policy.**—The result was natural. The provincial committees themselves were overwhelmed and overworked with the mass of detailed administration. They had little time, nor little desire, to go about among the communes to see that the regulations were enforced. The local committees were given the food and allowed to deliver it to the consumers practically without check and control, and this merely meant that they acted according to their own interpretation of, or often paid little heed to, the regulations. From this *laissez-faire* policy grew many of the difficulties which were to develop at the end of the year and in 1916 in the matter of local distributions and in the considerable volume of illicit traffic that had developed. If the American delegates had been given from the beginning the authority and the instructions to install a system of inspecting and controlling the local committees, similar to that ultimately adopted, most of the abuses might have been avoided. But the Belgian committees rather objected to any such assumption of authority by the American delegates and the directors in Brussels were inclined to agree with the Belgian committees. As Connett wrote in another letter in March: 'The more I see of the work in the provinces, the more convinced I am that it is not the business of American delegates to get mixed up in a lot of unimportant foolish details which others can perform better than they. I know of several instances where the preoccupation of our men in unimportant details has prevented their seeing important matters which they should have known about.'

The American delegates therefore were forced to content themselves with the exercise of such functions as their committees were willing that they should perform, and hence it came about that the detailed duties differed in every province and the power and authority of the American delegate were never clearly defined, but depended upon the individual adjustment worked out by each man with his provincial committee. So it came about also that the delegates came to be in many cases more diplomatic and social representatives of the Commission, and a source of moral encouragement and stimulation to the Belgian committees and their Belgian friends, than actual directors or executive heads of the relief operations in the province to which they were assigned.

**Mr. Crosby's Administration.**—Mr. Oscar T. Crosby succeeded Mr. Connett as director in the middle of April. Mr. Crosby in general followed out the same general policy that had been adopted by Mr. Connett. He was personally more sympathetic to the delegates than Connett had been, but did little to increase the authority or extend the duties of the provincial delegates. It was Mr. Crosby who, with the aid of Mr. Connett and Mr. John Beaver White, of the London office, drew up the agreement with Major von Kessler for the work of the Commission in Northern France. He endeavoured as far as possible

to get the German authorities to adopt a sympathetic attitude toward the Commission and its work and did everything that he could to emphasise more strongly than ever the neutrality of the Commission. He believed that the Commission had made a technical error in identifying itself so thoroughly with the Belgians, as this had tended to arouse suspicion in the minds of the Germans as to what the Americans were really trying to do. He succeeded in carrying out successfully some very difficult negotiations with the German authorities in Belgium to secure more favourable conditions of work for the Commission. He also negotiated, with the armies in Flanders, agreements similar to those for Northern France to serve as a basis for the Commission's work in Flanders.

**The organisation of the Brussels Office.**—In the meanwhile, during the first half of 1915, the organisation of the Brussels office was being completed and perfected. Baetens soon brought the shipping department into a state of surprising efficiency, in spite of the conditions under which all transportation had to be carried on. The secretariat, under Mr. P. C. Galpin, worked out satisfactory systems for the handling of correspondence and for the filing of documents. The secretariat, in addition, presided over by the genial Galpin, became the meeting-place and the centre of gossip among the members of the Commission in Belgium. It was there they would cool their heels and wait for a chance to take up their troubles with the director. No description of the Brussels office would be complete without recalling this function of the secretariat.

The diplomatic secretary was able, month by month, to secure from the Germans most of the passports asked for and practically all those actually used. Mr. W. H. Chadbourn, who arrived in Belgium in January, was made a sort of chief inspector for the provinces and, until April, when he was made chief representative for Northern France, went about from place to place, studying the organisation of the various committees, making reports to the directors on the general situation and giving advice to the various delegates.

**The Luncheons at 66, Rue des Colonies.**—Early in January a luncheon room was opened in the Commission's offices. It soon became a gathering place, at luncheon time, for the heads of departments and provincial delegates. Probably one of the most vivid recollections of the delegates who served in Belgium centres about those luncheons in the Rue des Colonies. It was there that Hugh Gibson would delight the company with his inimitable witticisms and caustic comments upon the general situation and particularly upon the German administration. It was there that the developments in Belgium were discussed from day to day and the problems of the Commission informally thrashed out. It was there too that the members of the C.R.B. came to know each other in a companionship which made of the body a real fraternity, a group of men actuated by unwavering loyalty to their chief and by self-sacrificing devotion to the interests of the people whom they had come to Belgium to aid.

**The Overland Cars of the Commission.**—In order to provide transportation for the delegates and to make possible quick communications, the Commission imported in December and January twenty light Overland touring cars. These, in addition to the dozen or more Belgian cars used by the Commission, provided ample means of conveyance for the delegates. At first the control of the automobiles of the Commission and of the supply of tyres and petrol was left rather loosely to the delegates themselves. In each province the delegates bought up such tyres and stores of petrol as they could find, or depended upon the Commission at Brussels to furnish them. In each province the delegates employed their own chauffeurs and had their own repairs done.

**The Automobile Department.**—But it was soon seen that this would be enormously expensive, and the Commission therefore established an automobile department under the direction of Armand Dulait, to care for the automobiles of the Commission, to draw up rules for their use, to employ and supervise the chauffeurs and to handle supplies and make repairs. After some negotiation the Commission secured permission to import the tyres and motor-fuel necessary for its own use. The garage at Brussels, by the middle of 1915, came actually to be in control of all the automobiles of the Commission. Chauffeurs were provided by M. Dulait and all the difficulties and details of looking after the Commission's fleet of two score of cars was admirably and successfully attended to by him.

The Overlands rendered good service to the Commission. For over two years they continued to provide the delegates with means of transport. No delegate will ever forget these Overland cars. When he thinks of Belgium there will come to his mind a narrow cobblestone road between two bottomless seas of mud, stretching down between two long lines of trees, and on this road a battered Overland car bouncing its way past obstinate carts and, occasionally, over unsuspecting chickens, dogs and even pigs.

**A Characteristic Experience.**—In the beginning most of the delegates learned to drive their own cars, but most of them drove with more speed than skill and the results were sometimes disastrous and always expensive. Thus, on one occasion, Mr. Chadbourn left Brussels to make a tour of the provinces with instructions to see that the American delegates used their cars very carefully and never exceeded a speed of more than thirty miles an hour. The first place he went to with these instructions was Hasselt. One morning, when he and the American delegate at Hasselt were ready to start out to make a tour of the regional centres, it was discovered that the chauffeur had developed blood-poisoning in the hand and was unable to drive. The local American delegate, undaunted, volunteered to drive the car himself. All went well for a time, but finally they came to a long stretch of road overhung with a sudden February mist. The road was narrow, the mud on either side very deep. A German car came up behind at full speed. The only thing to do was to increase speed or get into the mud. The Hasselt delegate had no intention of getting into the mud and soon was going over fifty miles an hour. All went well for a while. The German car turned down a side road. Then suddenly Mr. Chadbourn and his driver found their road had discovered an unexpected turning at an angle of some ninety degrees. Squarely ahead of them was a vicinal railway track. The distance was too short to stop, the angle too acute to turn, and the car, after hurtling uncertainly over the railway track, skidded between two trees and turned a double somersault into a ditch ten feet deep on the other side. As the car went over, Mr. Chadbourn and the Belgian secretary of the Hasselt delegate were thrown some distance ahead into the soft mud of the ditch. The Hasselt delegate himself, unable to get loose from the wheel, dropped out of the car as it turned over and fell into the bottom of the ditch, where for a fraction of a second he watched the car with incredible slowness coming slowly down on top of him; but the ditch was V-shaped and narrow at the bottom of the V, and the car stuck on the sides before it reached the bottom. No one was injured, though the whole party were rather shaken. Mr. Chadbourn made no comments, but immediately sought out a Belgian estaminet and fortified his resolution. He said little to the local delegate, but when he returned to Brussels two very strict and emphatic letters were sent out to all delegates providing that henceforth the car should only be driven by chauffeurs and not by delegates and the speed-limit should never exceed twenty miles an hour.

The Prerogatives of the first Delegates.—Of course these regulations, like all others, were not at once lived up to. Each delegate at that time was in a way the lord of his own province. The delegates had in most cases organised the work in the province where they were stationed before the Brussels office was effectively organised. The work of the Commission in their province they considered a very personal matter, and they depended little, if at all, upon the Brussels office. But as time went on this too changed. The situation in the country grew more desperate and the difficulties of the work increased. The German control became more strongly exercised and the local delegates, as the personnel changed gradually, found themselves more and more dependent upon the Brussels office for support and counsel, and their early attributes were for the most part lost and they became cogs in the machine of food distribution.

### PROBLEMS OF FOOD DISTRIBUTION

The adoption of a Rationing System.—In the chapter having to do with the initial organisation of the Comité National, something has already been said of the system which was developed for the distribution of food inside Belgium. At the outset certain definite principles were laid down which were to be strictly followed and which in fact were more extensively applied with each month's work. It had been decided, for example, that a uniform ration should be adopted for all Belgium and that rich and poor alike should be placed on the same footing so far as the rations of the essential foodstuffs were concerned; but a system of universal rationing was not immediately established, except in the case of bread. From the first it had been the rule that a ration of 250 grammes of flour per day *per capita* should be allotted to everyone, as soon as the importations of wheat and flour were sufficient to permit such a distribution. By the middle of January this ration was actually being distributed in practically the whole of Belgium. The other articles of food were not at first definitely rationed. The various provincial committees were shipped their allotted percentage and were practically left free to devise their own rules for the distribution. Usually the provincial committees provided for the distribution of these foods on a ration basis, but the amount to be distributed varied in the different provinces and at different times. When a province would receive considerable shipments of any one of these articles a general *pro rata* distribution would be ordered, the quantity depending upon the stock available for distribution. It was not until the fall of 1915, after Hoover's visit to Brussels in October, that the Comité National put into effect a definite system for rationing all commodities.

Methods of Food Distribution in 1915.—The food was distributed in different ways in practically every province. No general system of household ration-cards was at first adopted. Each commune devised methods for itself to provide for the distribution of the food to the consumers, and for checking this distribution to prevent duplication and other abuses. The necessity, however, of having some general and uniform method of controlling local distributions soon became apparent. In some of the provinces, particularly in Brabant, the Hainaut and Limbourg, the provincial committees arranged within a month or two after the beginning of food distribution for the issuance of ration-cards to each household. Each commune was required to closely check the cards issued and to make sure that the number of rations called for on each card actually represented the number of people in the household. The card bore upon it, in most cases, the name and

address of the head of the household and the number of rations to be drawn. It had blank columns in which the quantities of the various foodstuffs issued at each distribution were to be entered. Ultimately all of the provincial committees adopted this system, although in some cases it was not universally applied until well along in the year 1916, when effective control was for the first time established over the operations of the local committees.

**The machinery of Food Distribution.**— In general the machinery of food distribution was the same in every province. The food for most of the provinces came directly from Rotterdam by the canals. Each province was divided into a number of regions, the number varying according to the area and population of the province. In each region there was a regional *dépôt* in charge of warehouse-keepers in the employ of the provincial committee. The food, when unloaded from the lighters, was either sent directly to these regional warehouses to be stored until such time as it was distributed to the communes, or was stored in large general warehouses located near the point where the cargoes were discharged. The method of issuing foodstuffs to the communes also varied in the different provinces. At first, since no regular ration was prescribed for the whole population and since the communes were left free to take only such supplies as they wished, the quantities distributed to the different communes varied greatly. As the communal committees were required to pay the provincial committee for all food issued to them, they only requested at first, the minimum quantities necessary. In general, the communes would make out a requisition of the quantities of food desired and would send this to the head office of the provincial committee. There the staff of the ‘*département d’alimentation*’ would check over the requisitions and make out orders for the deliveries to the communes of the quantities desired, or of such proportions of these quantities as the stocks available permitted. Usually no food was issued from a regional warehouse to a commune without a delivery order made out in this way by the provincial committee. In some cases the order was approved and signed also by the American delegate.

**The control of the C.R.B. Delegate over Food Distribution.**— At the beginning of the work it had been agreed that, as an added protection, all foods should be considered the property of the C.R.B. and should be under the nominal control of the delegate of the C.R.B. until such time as it was actually distributed to the ultimate consumer. In the nature of things such a control could be only nominal. The American delegate himself could not pretend to personally supervise and inspect the operations of from ten to twelve regional warehouses. Still less could he hope to have any real control over the hundreds of communal committees and communal *dépôts*, save to make sure for himself in a general way that the fundamental principles of food distribution were being followed. Usually the American delegate received daily, weekly, and monthly reports from the provincial committee of the distributions of food from the regional warehouses to the communes. Food arrivals were of course under the direct control of the delegate until such time as he endorsed the bill of lading and thereby turned over the shipment to the provincial committee. All the expenses of operation within the province had to be borne by the provincial committee; thus all such charges as the towage of lighters beyond the original destination point, demurrage charges on lighters, the cost of unloading and of storing supplies and the expenses of distribution to the communes were paid by the provincial committee concerned. The American delegate therefore had to work in the closest possible co-operation with the provincial committee at every stage in the distribution of food. The distribution of bread involved two rather difficult problems, those of milling the wheat and baking the bread.

**Wheat and Flour Importations.**—At first the Commission received from America large quantities of white flour which had been donated to the Commission. This white flour was at first generally distributed among all the provinces. The Belgian committees much preferred the importation of wheat, since this provided employment in the mills and at the same time placed at the disposal of the provincial committees considerable quantities of bran. The great shortage of food for the livestock, especially in the rural provinces, made this bran all the more appreciated. It was for this reason that, at the beginning of February, the Commission, in agreement with the Comité National, decided to ship all further white flour received to the city of Brussels and to restrict its importations so far as possible to wheat. There was no great need for animal food in Brussels, and the people of the city were much more accustomed to white bread than the inhabitants of the country districts. As long as the stock of white flour lasted, therefore, the people of Brussels had white bread, while in the provinces the only bread to be had was the grey bread made from flour milled locally.

**The Control of Milling. Milling Percentages.**—At first no definite milling percentage was established. Each province was left free to mill its flour as it saw fit. In general the flour during the first six months was milled on a 90 per cent. basis, i.e. 90 per cent. of the whole wheat was converted into flour. This made a very grey flour, as can readily be appreciated if one remembers that ordinary white flour is milled on a 60 per cent. basis. Practically all the middlings and shorts, which form by-products of the milling of white flour, were left in the 90 per cent. flour and only the outside husk of the grain was removed. In some of the provinces, as in Limbourg, where no big mills were available, the wheat was at first ground in the small wind and water mills, which in many cases had been practically idle for half a century. These small mills seldom possessed anything in the nature of a sifting machine and the flour ground was therefore 100 per cent. flour, with the addition of a liberal sprinkling of grit coming from the rough mill-stones. There was naturally much objection to the bread which was produced from flour milled on a 100 per cent. or even 90 per cent. basis. Many people contended that their stomachs were being ruined by eating the 'pain de ravitaillement.' When Mr. William C. Edgar, the editor of the *Northwestern Miller*, of Minneapolis, Minnesota, who had collected large quantities of gift flour for the Belgians, came into Belgium in the early part of 1915, he was horrified at the thought of people eating bread made of 100 per cent. or even of 90 per cent. flour, and suggested to the Commission that a lower milling percentage should be adopted. He strongly urged that only white flour should be utilised in the making of bread. This, however, would have required the use of a considerable greater quantity of wheat and the Commission was not in a position to make such an increase in its program of imports. After much discussion it was finally decided by the Commission, in agreement with the Comité National, that all milling in Belgium should be done at 82 per cent. This percentage was generally maintained from September 1915 to March 1917, except for small quantities of flour which were milled at 75 per cent. because of the bad quality of the wheat and for the white flour which was milled on a 60 per cent. basis for the use of hospitals and the sick. The milling ratio was changed back to 90 per cent. in most of the provinces in February and March 1917, because of the alarming decrease in the Commission's importations as a result of the diplomatic situation and of America's entrance into the war against Germany. A fuller account of the milling situation will be found in a report by Mr. Alfred C. B. Fletcher, in the Commission's volume of special reports issued at the end of 1918.

The Contracts with the Belgian Mills.—At first each provincial committee made its own contracts with local mills. Within a few months, however, the Comité National, after having made a collection of the milling contracts in force in the different provinces, recommended that a standard form of contract should be devised, embodying certain definite principles: first, that everything that came from the milling of wheat, i.e. the bran as well as the flour, should be turned back to the provincial committee and should be disposed of by it; secondly, that the milling should be done at a fixed percentage agreed upon by the C.R.B. and the C.N., i.e. on an 82 per cent. basis; and thirdly, that the miller should be paid for grinding the wheat a sum from 1 franc per 100 kilos to 2 francs per 100 kilos, depending upon the local situation. Ultimately all the big mills made contracts on a basis of 1 franc per 100 kilos, while the small mills such as those in Namur and the Hainaut were permitted *fos.* 1.25 or *fos.* 1.50 per 100 kilos. The miller was required to work exclusively for the Commission and the provincial committee, and his mill was to be supervised and controlled by inspectors appointed for the purpose by the relief organisations. As a general rule, the milling was given to a comparatively restricted number of the more efficient mills, as these could do the work more quickly, efficiently and economically; and it was much easier to exercise a strict control over a few large mills than over a multitude of small ones.

Control of the Bakers. The control of the bakers has also been referred to previously. Two systems were in vogue, one of which left the actual distribution of bread to the baker under a strict control exercised by the local committee. The other provided a system of communal bread depôts, to which the bakers were required to deliver all bread baked; the actual distribution was made by the local committee from these special bread depôts. This latter method, of course, was the easiest, so far as control was concerned, but imposed a considerable burden of labour upon the local committees and involved a considerable restriction of individual liberties. It was therefore not very popular with the Belgians, and was not generally put into operation outside of the Hainaut. In nearly all the chief towns, special services were created by the local committees for the control of bakers and the checking up of their list of customers. This subject will be dealt with again in a later chapter devoted to the general problem of the inspection and control of food distributions.

## THE WORK OF THE BENEVOLENT DEPARTMENT

The Increase of Destitution in Belgium.—It has been repeatedly emphasised in the course of this history that the work of the Commission and the Comité National fell into two clearly defined divisions. On the one hand there was the problem of provisioning a whole population, of buying, transporting to Belgium and distributing the essential foods for the seven million people of the country. On the other hand there was the problem of destitution, of caring for the increasing number of Belgians who, through the events of the war, had become practically penniless and were dependent upon charity for their daily bread. On November 1, 1914, it was estimated by the Comité National that there were 1,200,000 wholly and partially destitute in Belgium. By the first of the year this number had grown to 1,500,000, and at the end of the first year's work of relief there were more than 2,000,000 destitute in Belgium.

The Benevolent Department.—The problem of caring for these people was handled by a separate department of the Comité National, the so-called 'Department de Secours.' Likewise, in each of the provincial committees, there was a special benevolent department

(departement de secours), and in each commune there was, alongside of the comité d'alimentation, a comité de secours. In the beginning only one form of relief was generally distributed. The people who were destitute were provided with their food gratuitously by the local committees. These committees were instructed by the Comité National and the provincial committees to examine carefully every application for relief and to take it upon themselves to see that no person in the community, no matter how poor, suffered from hunger.

**The Distribution of ordinary Relief.**—The food was distributed in various ways. In the larger towns the comité de secours usually maintained soup-kitchens and canteens, where soup or other warm food was served once or sometimes twice a day to all those provided with tickets by the comité de secours. Bread was served with the soup or meal. In the smaller places soup-kitchens were seldom maintained, at least until 1916. In these districts the poor would be given authorisation by the comité de secours to receive from the local food depôts the prescribed ration of food gratuitously. In addition to the articles furnished by the Commission, the local secours committees usually also distributed native products such as vegetables, potatoes, milk and occasionally meat to the poor. Sometimes the local committee would make direct grants of money, but this form of relief was discouraged by the superior committees, because it was felt that money so distributed might be expended foolishly and the relief measures abused. In the case of those families who had always lived in comparative ease and whom the war had reduced to complete destitution, the local secours committees usually made direct grants of money either as loans or as gifts.

**The source of the Benevolent Funds.**—The cost of maintaining the work of the local committees, in distributing food gratuitously to the poor, in so far as this was contributed by the Comité National, was born entirely by the benevolent fund of the Commission, i.e. from the moneys collected as gifts or from the profits gained by the Commission in its operations. It was arranged that the local committees should pay part of the cost from their own resources, that the provincial committees should grant subsidies to cover the balance of the expenses of the local committees of secours, and that the Comité National should allocate to the provinces a sufficient weekly subsidy to permit the provincial committees to supply the communes with the necessary funds. These weekly subsidies granted by the Comité National to the provinces amounted during the first part of this year, 1915, to the following weekly sums :

Antwerp	..	..	..	..	100,000	francs.
Brabant	..	..	..	..	110,000	„
West Flanders	..	..	..	..	100,000	„
East Flanders	..	..	..	..	60,000	„
Hainaut	..	..	..	..	150,000	„
Liège	..	..	..	..	100,000	„
Limbourg	..	..	..	..	55,000	„
Luxembourg	..	..	..	..	60,000	„
Namur	..	..	..	..	62,500	„
Givet	..	..	..	..	7,500	„
Maubeuge	..	..	..	..	20,000	„

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Total .. .. 825,000 francs.

No subsidy was accorded Greater Brussels, because the subscriptions of the wealthy citizens



of the city provided sufficient funds to cover the whole cost of carrying on the work of feeding and clothing the 200,000 destitute.

**The Activities of the Comité National.**—The Comité National organised very carefully the work of its *departement de secours*. At first the Commission and the American delegates had little to do with the actual administration of relief funds. The Comité National, working through many sub-committees and subsidised organisations, built up a marvellous and efficient machine for the prevention and alleviation of distress. The delegates of the Commission only concerned themselves with seeing that the *secours* funds were actually distributed in accordance with the regulations drawn up by the Comité National and the Commission and making sure that no partiality or favouritism were shown by the local committees in their distributions.

At the very beginning of December 1914 instructions were sent out to the provincial committees as to the methods to be followed in the administration of the charitable funds to be allocated to them. They were called upon to use every possible means to relieve distress. The guiding principles to be followed were justice to all, economy in disbursements, wise and judicious administration, and comprehensive organisation. Very soon, as special needs or special forms of distress appeared, the Comité National organised separate sections to deal with each case. Thus the care of the children, in whatever form it might be directed, was put under a section called ‘*Aide et protection aux œuvres de l'enfance*.’ This section was provided with a regular subsidy by the Comité National and authorised to make allocations to various institutions having to do with the care of the children, such as maternity homes, nursing societies, babies’ milk canteens, religious and lay orphanages, the care of war orphans, the society for the protection of babies, the institution for the care of abandoned children, etc., etc. The total sum expended by this section in the first year of the work of the Comité National was something over 300,000 francs. As a result of its activities various charitable organisations throughout Belgium were able to extend their work until babies and young children were better cared for and looked after than they had ever been before, even in times of peace. In every town and in almost every village baby canteens were created under the supervision of doctors and qualified nurses. Regular diets were prescribed according to the condition of each infant and the food and care was given gratuitously. Nursing mothers were also aided by the activities of the same section and provided with food and care.

**The Clothing Department.**—One of the most extensive charitable activities of the Comité National, after the actual free distribution of food, was the work of the clothing department. The Comité Centrale in the early days of its activities had organised a clothing department under the direction of M. Emmanuel Janssens, and when the Comité National came into being the clothing committee of the Comité Central became the ‘*section du vêtement*’ or clothing department of the Comité National, still under the direction of M. Janssens. A campaign was made in America for gifts of clothing, and during the first winter over 4½ million francs’ worth of clothing was introduced by the Commission into Belgium. During the same period the clothing department in Brussels made up and distributed gratuitously clothing to the value approximately of three million francs. The *section du vêtement* organised in Brussels a large number of workshops where remunerative employment was given to many thousands of women. Cloth was obtained in the country and hundreds of thousands of garments were manufactured for free distribution to the

poor. In nearly all the provinces, institutions similar to those in Brussels were created very early in the winter of 1915 and set to work to provide clothing for the destitute. The work done at Antwerp was especially notable. There the *œuvroire* were admirably organised, and special efforts were made to look out for the moral and intellectual welfare of the unemployed girls and women of the town who were taken into the workshops.

Mr. Milton M. Brown, who was for a year the Commission's representative for the clothing department, has written a long and illuminating report on the work of that clothing department and a summary of which is published in the volume of special reports published in 1918.

**The Pole Nord at Brussels.**—The central warehouse of the clothing department was in Brussels, where a big concert hall, the Pole Nord, was taken over and used as a central distribution place. There the clothing coming from America was emptied out, sorted, and, if necessary, fumigated, washed and repaired. The clothing was made up in bundles for distribution to the various provinces. Most of the work in Brussels was directed by a very clever and efficient society woman, Madame Phillipson-Wiener, who devoted her time to the work of supervising the operations of the central clothing warehouse. In the provinces there were similar central warehouses from which the communes were supplied. There was hardly a village in Belgium which did not, during this first winter, receive its bundle of clothing for the poor, and it can probably be said with absolute accuracy that there was no occasion for any person, however poor, either to go hungry or to go unclothed during the first year's work of relief.

**Extraordinary Relief Measures.**—In addition to these activities of the Comité National, which were supported by voluntary contributions abroad or in Belgium, there was another category of relief distribution which was no less important. This was the distribution of moneys provided by the Belgian Government and distributed in the manner directed by the Belgian Government. This money was distributed in three principal ways: first, in the form of subsidies or pensions 'to families whom the war has deprived of their means of support' (*secours aux familles que la guerre a privé de leur soutien*). Of course the families so designated were the families of soldiers serving in the Belgian army. Approximately five million francs a month were expended in this way. A second form of relief supported through the subsidy from the Belgian Government was that of loans, chiefly to the communes. There was established a special society for making communal loans, and another society of advances and loans which would make loans to private individuals at low rates of interest against reasonable security. Approximately three million francs a month was distributed in this way. Five million francs additional were paid out to bondholders of the Belgian Government as their interest on their securities. This accounts for 13 million francs per month out of the 25 million received from the Belgian Government under the arrangement concluded in November 1915 and confirmed in February 1915. The remaining 12 million francs were used, after April, to aid the unemployed in Belgium.

**Relief for the Unemployed.**—In February a special committee was appointed to investigate the question of relief to the unemployed. After a thorough investigation the committee reported to the Comité National advising the establishment of a '*fond de chômage*.' Regulations and rules were drawn up to govern the distribution of these unemployment benefits. It was provided that wherever possible the communes should use the money allocated to them to give employment to those out of work, but if it was impossible to find employment for them, they were in any case to be granted a definite

weekly aid, nine-tenths of which would come from the Comité National and would be distributed in the form of food and one-tenth contributed by the commune in money. It was provided that the amount of the benefit should vary according to a man's actual resources and to the number of his family. By June 1 there were more than 750,000 people receiving the unemployment benefit and the total sum distributed was three million francs a week. Hence the average paid to each unemployed was in the neighbourhood of four francs weekly. This benefit was usually added to the ordinary relief (*secours ordinaire*) in food and clothing which the destitute were already receiving. The object of this fund was to maintain the health and courage of the Belgian workmen, who, in consequence of conditions over which they had no control, found themselves forcibly unemployed.

**Control over the Administration of Relief.**—The work of administering and inspecting the operations of these relief measures was naturally a very grave burden on the services of the Comité National and the provincial committees. The first attempt to control local committees was prompted by the realisation of the necessity of having some check on the expenditure of the funds distributed by the Comité National. Generally inspectors were appointed by the provincial committees to go about the communes inspecting their books and investigating the distribution of relief funds, but usually this inspection was not of a very thorough character and the method in which the relief was actually distributed varied widely in different parts of Belgium.

In thinking of the work of the Commission, therefore, one should bear in mind that alongside of the food-distribution there was at the same time this complicated machinery for the prevention and relief of distress. The work of the Commission as a whole cannot be appreciated unless it is remembered that the Commission was not only providing certain foods for the whole population but also was making possible charitable aid to every destitute family in Belgium.

## RELATIONS WITH THE GERMAN AUTHORITIES

**First difficulties with the German Authorities.**—The attitude first taken by the higher German authorities in Belgium toward the Commission was a very liberal one, as has been described in Chapter V, but once the work of the Commission was fairly under way, the Germans began to perceive certain disadvantages to themselves in permitting such a neutral body too great liberty of action. The Governor-General himself, as he told Mr. Whitlock in January and Mr. Hoover in February, was much dismayed at the degree of freedom enjoyed by the delegates of the Commission in Belgium and at the extent of the activities of the Commission generally. At first little difficulty had been experienced in obtaining passports from the German authorities and in securing many concessions in the matter of transports and communications, but even as early as January 1915 the attitude of the Germans changed. They began to make objection to the issuance of passports; to delay action on applications, often for weeks at a time, with the result that the Commission had to undertake the negotiations described in Chapter V, to secure adequate passports for members of the Commission.

**Passport Troubles.**—In February the Governor-General definitely limited the number of passports that could be granted to the Commission and drew up regulations

for the issuance of these passports. These were modified later, as a result of representations made by Mr. Hoover, but even the modified regulations put into effect on April 15 had the result of cutting down considerably the number of passports and the liberty of action enjoyed previously by the delegates of the Commission. A general order was sent out to all the provincial governors, providing that henceforth passports to members of the Commission should be issued only by the central pass-bureau in Brussels, and specifying the passports to be issued to each delegate. This caused great inconveniences in many places, because the delegates and the provincial committees had been able previously to obtain the passports they needed from the provincial authorities. As a result of the new orders, however, the provincial authorities refused to issue further passes without special authorisation from Brussels, and all the delegates became dependent upon the Brussels office for their military passports. For a time there was considerable embarrassment because of the delays in getting the passports issued, but M. Bulle finally arranged to secure, on the first of each month, passports for all members of the Commission and the Comité National permitting them to travel freely about their own provinces and between their province and Brussels during the ensuing month.

**Trials of the C.R.B. Delegates.**—Members of the Commission were subjected to many kinds of petty annoyances at the hands of the German authorities. Often delegates were arrested on suspicion by some local commandant. Their automobiles and their person were thoroughly searched, and in several cases the unfortunate delegates languished for several days in a German prison before news of their plight reached the Brussels office and orders for their release could be secured from the General Government. Thus, two of the men, Harwood Stacy and Caughey, who were bringing one of the new Overland cars into Belgium, were arrested near Antwerp on Christmas Eve, 1914. Their passports were perfectly in order, but in spite of that fact they were kept for four days in the Antwerp prison. Other similar, though less aggravated, cases occurred later from time to time. The Commission naturally vigorously protested to the General Government, especially in the matter of the difficulty experienced and indignity suffered by the delegates in going to and from Holland. The officials of the General Government always assured the Commission that orders had been sent to the frontier that the delegates should be strictly respected, but in spite of these assurances the same annoyances continued to be experienced.

**An illustration of the workings of the German Administration.**—Finally one of the high officers in the General Government said that he would go across in civilian clothes with some of the members of the Commission to see what the trouble was. When the party arrived at the frontier they were held up as usual and thoroughly searched. The officer protested, stated his name and rank, and demanded to be allowed to pass, but the frontier post, undisturbed by his expostulations, proceeded to give him more trouble even than usual. His rage soon burst all bounds and in his anger he became involved in a fracas with the officer commanding the frontier post. He returned to Brussels, boiling with indignation, but convinced of the correctness of the Commission's reports. Even this experience failed to bring about much change in the situation. As the posts became more accustomed to the passing of the delegates, they took less trouble with them, but periodically their watchfulness would revive and an unlucky delegate would be given an unpleasant hour or two. The Governor-General finally gave the assurance that no member of the Commission would be bodily searched, except upon direct orders from the Governor-

General, but even this failed to change the situation, as some of the delegates in crossing to Holland found to their chagrin.

The disposition of the Germans to interfere with the Relief Work.—But these were, after all, petty matters. The delegates had come to Belgium prepared for such unpleasantnesses and consequently accepted them as part of the natural order of things. Far more serious was the tendency shown by the General Government, in the early part of 1915, to interfere in the activities of the relief work. The Governor-General, like all other military personages, scouted the idea that it was the duty of the Commission to see that the Germans kept their promises. As von Bissing said to Hoover in an interview in February 1915, the Germans thought the Americans were altogether too active in Belgium. In his opinion it would be sufficient for the Commission to have delegates attached to the various chief warehouses and not go travelling about the country. The Germans contended that the Belgians themselves should distribute the food under control by the military authorities. They therefore tried as far as possible to limit the freedom and the activities of the Commission.

Difficulties of dealing with the Germans.—Until the fall of 1915 the Germans had created no special office or delegated no one set of officials to deal with the Commission in matters affecting the provisioning of the Belgian population. This was inconvenient to the Germans and to the Commission alike. The Commission had constantly to be going the round of the German bureaux in order to find the proper official with whom to deal, whenever any difficulty arose.

In so far as the guarantees were concerned, the Commission negotiated chiefly through the patron Ministers, Brand Whitlock and the Marquis de Villalobar. Their representations were always made to the political department that was presided over by the Baron von der Lancken. 'Minister of Foreign Affairs to the General Government in Belgium'; but for routine matters of Commission work, the Commission had to deal directly with the civil administration under Dr. von Sandt in regard to most of the questions that arose. There was a special department of the General Government having to do with automobiles and their use in the occupied territory. Consequently, the Commission's negotiations about automobiles had to be carried on independently with this department. There was a separate administration for the railroads, which was not even under the direction of the Governor-General, but was directly subsidiary to the supreme army command. All transportation matters had to be taken up with this railroad direction. Similarly, the canals were controlled by a special administrative unit, fairly independent from the others, and the great volume of canal traffic necessary to the Commission's work led to almost daily difficulties that had to be taken up through this canal direction office.

Relations with the Civil Administration.—In general the supervision of the Belgian committees and of the details of food distribution was turned over, at the beginning, by the Governor-General to Dr. von Sandt and his civil administration. The complication of authorities made it difficult for the Commission to secure prompt action in the matters in which it had to deal with the Germans, but it also made it difficult for the Germans to know exactly what the Commission was doing. The consequence was continual friction and, on the part of the Germans, an increasing suspicion of the Commission, largely due to ignorance of its exact functions and activities. This was finally brought to a head in a charge of espionage, which, though ludicrous enough at bottom, yet came near having serious consequences. The story of this case will be told in the next chapter.

**Negotiations for the Financing of the Relief Work.**—Hoover had presented to the Imperial Government in Berlin in February 1915 memoranda stating the organisation of the Commission, which has been already described. At about the same time he had taken up negotiations with financial officials of the German Government with the idea of securing the German approval of the scheme for a relief-bank to be created in Belgium, to hold the funds of the Comité National and to serve as a depository for the money received from the sale of foodstuffs. With this as security, Hoover proposed to negotiate a loan in America for the Commission. Before any such loan could be secured, positive assurances had to be obtained from the Germans that the funds of the Commission and the Comité National and of the projected relief-bank would not be interfered with in any way by the Germans. Most of these negotiations were carried on through Dr. Schacht, of the Finance Department of the Imperial Government. Dr. Schacht approved the idea of the creation of a relief-bank or co-operative provisioning society in Belgium which would hold on deposit the sums paid in in Belgium as security for the loans to be negotiated in America ; but before the negotiations were completed, difficulties arose between the Germans and the Comité National which threatened for a time to endanger the continuance of the relief work.

**Payments made by the Comité National for the Belgian Government.**—As a result of the securing of a subsidy from the Belgian Government, the Comité National was encharged early in 1915 with the distribution in Belgium of a sum in francs equivalent to the subsidy received by the Commission in London. In a sense this transaction can therefore be considered as a simple exchange operation. The Belgian Government, desiring to have certain payments made in Belgium, turned the sums over to the Commission, the only organisation that could transmit money to Belgium. The Comité National was then expected to distribute the money in accord with the instructions of the Belgian Government. The sum concerned was £1,000,000 a month, or something more than 25,000,000 francs. This money was to be paid out : first, for the maintenance of families of Belgian soldiers ; secondly, to the employees and bondholders of the Belgian Government in Belgium ; and to the communal administrations, in the form of loans, to permit them to carry on their usual services and to care for the increasing number of destitute. In February 1915, the Comité National outlined the scheme for using part of this money to create an unemployment benefit fund. This scheme was put into effect in the month of April. All of these payments in the interest of the Belgian Government necessarily involved a large amount of correspondence between the various committees concerned, and it was in this matter that the suspicion of the Germans became more than ever directed against the activities of the Comité National.

**The Germans and the question of Belgian Labour.**—The Germans had from the first attempted to induce Belgian workmen, especially the railroad employees, to accept work from them. The Belgians naturally preferred not to enter the service of the Germans if they could possibly avoid it, i.e. if they could find in any other way means of sustenance. The Comité National had already provided that all the destitute should receive from the local charity committees vouchers or certificates that would permit them to obtain their food from the local dépôts of the committee gratuitously. This new employment fund provided in addition for the payment of considerable sums to the unemployed. The census of unemployed showed that there were over 750,000 unemployed workmen in Belgium. The Comité National arranged to pay nearly three million francs weekly to these

unemployed. The Germans began to regard the activities of the benevolent department of the Comité National with great suspicion. It seems to have occurred to them that the workmen would be supported in this way and would thus not be compelled by necessity to seek employment from the Germans.

**German Suspicion of the activities of the Comité National.**—At the same time the activities of the Comité National, which had been described by several of its own members as a sort of volunteer government in Belgium, began to further arouse the suspicion and the jealousy of the Germans. The Comité National, with its sub-committees in every province and every commune, might easily become a gigantic machine for espionage, for engineering a revolt against the Germans, or for stoutly maintaining the resistance of the Belgian people to their temporary rulers. The increasing efforts of the Comité National to obtain a strict control over local committees and to coerce them into obeying orders seemed to the Germans an activity of a political sort which could not be permitted to go on except under the severest control. The Comité National had from the first, in order to escape conflict with the German authorities, attempted to maintain a strict distinction between its organisation and Belgian political institutions. In many places, however, the distinction between the local committees and the communal administration was very slight. The burgomaster was very often the chairman of the local relief committee and the communal councillors usually made up the majority of the committees. As early as April the Comité National became aware that the German authorities were about to put into effect a system for the strict control of the activities of the Comité National and its sub-committees. Thus Franquai announced at one of the April meetings of the Comité National that the Germans proposed to have delegates of the General Government or the provincial governments attend all meetings of the Comité National and the provincial committees. No immediate action along this line was taken however.

**Efforts of the Comité National to overcome this Suspicion.**—In order to try to avoid arbitrary action by the Germans, the Comité National decided that the unemployment funds should be distributed in the form of food rather than in the form of money payments. Nine-tenths of the moneys paid out for unemployment benefit in every community was distributed by the Comité National, one-tenth by the communal administration. The Comité National therefore provided that the nine-tenths contributed by it should be distributed in the form of food, while only the one-tenth contributed by the communes should be distributed in money. At the meeting of the Comité National on May 6, Franquai read a new and strongly-worded set of instructions to the communal committees, insisting that the private character of these committees be everywhere maintained, and that a complete separation should be made between the local relief committees and the communal administration.

**The German Proposal for the Reorganisation of the Relief Work.**—But these measures did not avert action by the Germans. After a considerable series of preliminary negotiations, Dr. Schacht, with the approval of the Governor-General, submitted to the Commission and the Comité National, on June 20, a proposal for the reorganisation of the Comité National. The chief features of this proposal was that the provisioning and benevolent departments should be completely separated; that the provisioning department should be established on an exclusively commercial basis and should be kept free from all political influence. It was to purchase against cash all the imported supplies and native wheat necessary and to resell the food, also against cash, to the provisioning

department of the provincial committees. Arrangements were made in this proposal for the organisation of a co-operative society to hold the security for a loan to be obtained in America. The sums received abroad by the Comité National and the Commission were to be used in the purchase of food to be sent to Belgium, but equal sums were to be taken from the funds of the provisioning department and placed at the disposal of the benevolent fund. The same procedure was to be followed in the case of profits arising from the sale of provisions. The money provided in this way for the benevolent department should be used as far as possible in providing work for the unemployed. Only those incapable of work should receive free help and this not in money but in food. All money utilised for charitable purposes should be expended only with the approval of the Germans. The accounts of the provisioning department were to be kept completely separate from those of the benevolent department, although both departments were to continue to be directed by the Commission and the Comité National.

**The Counter-proposal of Hoover and Francqui.**—Mr. Hoover and Francqui on the same day submitted a counter-proposition to the German Government. This was practically the same as the proposal of Dr. Schacht, except for the provisions in regard to the distribution of relief. In this matter Hoover and Francqui insisted that in giving work to those who were legitimately unemployed through the cessation of industry, the Comité National should be the only judge as to the distribution of relief. The Comité National would endeavour to undertake works of public utility, with the approval of the German authorities, but the German authorities should not in any case themselves decide on any particular piece of work to be undertaken by the Comité National or by the unemployed receiving support from the Comité National. Money should continue to be paid as before to the charitable institutions already created by the Comité National. An agreement with the Germans, as to the use of charitable funds, should be necessary only in the case of new charitable enterprises to be undertaken.

**Von Bissing's Letter of June 26, 1915.**—The conflict in opinion in the matter of the distribution of relief explains very well the difference in point of view between the relief bodies and the German authorities. The German attitude toward the Comité National and its scheme for the reorganisation of the relief work was fully propounded in a long letter addressed to the patron Ministers on June 26, 1915, by the Governor-General von Bissing. Von Bissing declared that he had never ceased to assist the work of the Comité National, but that since its sphere of activity had developed to quite unforeseen proportions, he considered it necessary that the activities of the Comité should be more clearly defined. For this reason he said that he had given instructions to the provincial governors to restrict the activities of the sub-committees. He declared that the local German authorities would be required to keep themselves informed of the activities of the various sub-organisations of the Comité National in their district. The presidents of the provincial administrations were to keep in constant contact with the heads of the provincial committees, and von Bissing recommended that these officials attend the regular meetings of the provincial committees. He said also that in the various regions the German civil commissioners should act in a similar way toward the regional committees in their districts.

**Control to be exercised over the Relief Committees.**—In order to effect a more complete control over the committees, all the correspondence in the future should be censored by the civil authorities, named above, instead of by the military authorities. To further restrain the Comité National and the provincial committees, the Governor-General



declared that these committees would not be allowed to give instructions directly to the communes. They would be permitted neither to make enquiries, nor to send questionnaires nor circulars to the communes, nor to receive from them any information or statistics, without having first consulted the German civil official concerned. The committees were not to make any rules or regulations for the communes. All measures of this sort were to be proposed to the civil administration and to be carried into effect by it. The committees were prohibited from taking any action limiting personal liberty or freedom of commerce. They were not to be allowed to threaten the communes with the stoppage of the food-supply or the imposition of higher prices as a means of securing compliance with regulations. In a general way, the committees were prohibited from making use of any pressure whatsoever to secure compliance with their instructions. In any cases where action was necessary the committee should propose measures to the civil authorities, who would take such action as they saw fit. Reports of the monthly accounts and finances of the committees should be communicated to the civil administration.

In regard to the matter of aid to the unemployed, the presidents of the provincial civil administrations were instructed to see that the unemployment benefit did not result in hindering the resumption of work by the labouring classes. No aid was to be given to any workman who refused to accept employment. The committees were forbidden to make any investigations or estimates as to the damages caused by war or by the activity of the Germans. The committees were not to be permitted to secure the right of police for their inspectors without the approval of the civil administration. The Commission and the Comité National had the right to investigate abuses in food distribution, but could not take any action themselves to punish offenders, but must proceed through the competent authorities. The committees were forbidden to use pressure to secure subscriptions to the working capital of the co-operative societies, created to reduce the operations of the provincial committees. The prices of foodstuffs were to be reduced as much as possible. The committee was instructed to avoid every tendency to monopolise the distribution of relief in Belgium. These, in brief, were the demands made by von Bissing.

Whitlock Objects to these Demands.—Many of these demands were completely unacceptable, as they would have taken away every semblance of liberty of action from the relief organisations, and would in fact have made them little more than a branch of the German Government. This the American Minister, Brand Whitlock, pointed out in a letter of June 29 to Baron von der Lancken when acknowledging the receipt of the Governor-General's letter. He therefore requested the Governor-General to postpone the putting into force of the measures announced until the reply of the Comité National to the letter should be received. 'As the measures projected would involve a complete upsetting of the various committees in Belgium depending on the Comité National, and would lead to a complete confusion in the administration of the relief work, if orders emanating from the Governor-General arrived at the different localities before the Comité National was in a position to give the necessary instructions to its subsidiary committees, we do not doubt that His Excellency the Governor-General will be good enough to conform to our desires.'

The attitude of the Comité National.—The Comité National were naturally much exercised over the threat of the Germans to reduce their organisation to complete subjection. In their reply they objected particularly to the presence of the German agents at the meetings of the local committees, as these committees were not deliberative but

merely executive, and had as a function the carrying out of instructions of the Comité National. The intervention of the Germans would remove the character of neutrality and privacy from the work of the committee and would imperil the very existence of the Comité National, as the French, Belgian and English Governments would be forced to decide that the Comité National and the Commission no longer possessed the necessary independence to see that the relief funds and food were actually distributed to the people. The committee did not object to the censorship and asked only that this should be arranged in such a way as not to hinder the regularity and promptness of correspondence. The Comité National also declared that it had continually attempted to maintain the private character of its organisation and to keep its services absolutely distinct from those of the communal administrations. The Comité also outlined its programme for relief to the unemployed and insisted that no measure should ever be taken to force the Belgian labourers to work for the Germans.

These objections of the Comité were presented to the patron Ministers and by them laid before the German authorities.

Hoover acts.—In the meantime, to check the attempt of the Germans to enforce impossible restrictive measures, Hoover laid the matter before the American Ambassador in London and the Foreign Office. He pointed out that the guarantees and obligations given by the Commission to the allied governments made it necessary that the Commission should see that the foodstuffs were distributed equitably to the entire population, without any interference from the German authorities. He insisted also that the Commission should enforce a rationing of food in Belgium and that this would be impossible if the Commission and the Comité National did not have the right to cut off the supply to any local committee which refused to carry out the regulations as to rationing. Hoover said also that the military authorities had shown tendencies of an inclination to use the food-supply imported by the Commission as a weapon to compel the civil population to work for the German army, by having their rations cut off, unless they agreed to accept employment from the Germans. 'The whole nature of the acts set out above fills our minds with some foreboding. These things have not yet come to a positive and final issue. If they cannot be straightened out by negotiation, it appears to me that the greatest catastrophe which could happen would ensue, i.e. the work may break down on points of minor issue between the belligerent powers. If such an event become imminent I should be glad if you could consider whether it would be feasible, in view of the importance of the work, that all of the Ambassadors who make up our list of honorary chairmen should have a meeting in Holland which could be attended by representatives of both the German and English Governments, with a view to placing the work of this Commission on a definite and feasible basis.'

In a letter of the Foreign Office of July 7 it was expressly provided that any agreement entered into by the Commission or the Comité National with the Germans should be submitted to the British Government before it was accepted. Hoover now decided that these regulations of Governor-General von Bissing came within the terms of the conditions of the Foreign Office and decided to submit von Bissing's demands to the Foreign Office.

The Conferences in Brussels and their Results.—Meanwhile, in Brussels, on July 7, a meeting was held between the German authorities, the protecting Ministers, Mr. Crosby and Mr. Francqui, at which the points presented by von Bissing's note were discussed.

The Germans agreed to yield in the matter of attendance of their representatives at committee meetings and declared that they were willing to leave the question of relief distribution and of forcible employment of the Belgians to be determined according to the provisions of The Hague Conventions. Crosby pointed out that no two persons of opposite interests had yet agreed upon the interpretation of any paragraph of the conventions, and suggested that the German interpretation of the regulations referred to should be obtained. On the following day the patron Ministers reached an understanding with the Germans which to them seemed to settle the matter. Crosby communicated the results of these meetings to Hoover, who had already taken up the matter with the Foreign Office.

**The action of the Foreign Office.**—On July 17, Sir Edward Grey wrote to the American Ambassador declaring that the British Government would insist that the Germans should not interfere in the activities of the Commission or the Comité National; that the whole of the relief work was based upon a spirit of non-interference and not on the strict rights of either government, and that the introduction of any such claims of right into these discussions would be fatal to the continuance of the work. He recapitulated the conditions made by the Marquis of Crew, in his letter of July 7, and said that the Foreign Office would continue to insist that the Commission and the Comité National should not be interfered with by the German authorities, either in the sale of foodstuffs or in their free distribution to those whom these organisations considered deserving of relief.

**German Authorities abandon their attempt to control the Relief Work.**—In the face of the determined opposition of the Comité National, the energetic protests of the patron Ministers and the uncompromising attitude of the British Government, the Governor-General readily perceived the necessity of modifying his proposals and giving up his project of putting an end to the independent activities of the relief organisations. Brand Whitlock, writing to Ambassador Page on July 19, said that as a result of two long conferences with Baron von der Lancken, the German authorities had finally agreed to accept the principles laid down in the note of the British Foreign Office of July 7, and that the work of the Commission would therefore go on under the conditions set forth in that letter. ‘This declaration was formally and officially made at the conclusion of our second long conference this afternoon and will be reduced to writing immediately and signed by the Governor-General. Upon receipt of the note, which will be in a day or two, I shall promptly forward it to you, but I wish to apprise you at once of this fortunate conclusion of our negotiations in order that there may be no misunderstanding or no interruption of the work of ravitaillement. It would be difficult to give you an idea of all the difficulties of the hard job and the amount of trouble we had during the last month with all these new negotiations. I am ninety-five years older than I was, and I wish I were on an inhabited island up in the Georgian Bay.’

The confirmation of this oral assurance of the German authorities was given in a letter, written by von der Lancken on July 29 to the patron Ministers. In this he said that the Governor-General ‘has declared himself in agreement with the principle that the work of ravitaillement should continue for the good of the Belgian population, under exactly the same conditions as were agreed upon between the Governor-General and the representatives of the neutral powers previously.’ Then he went on to state in detail the assurance of the Governor-General that the food imported by the Commission would not be touched, that the Belgian civil population alone would secure the benefit of the relief distribution by the Comité National, that the Comité National and the C.R.B. would

continue to enjoy the liberty of action necessary to their duties, and that the Governor-General would at no time make use of the Comité National or of the relief work to the Belgian working class to work for the benefit of the German army contrary to the stipulations of The Hague Convention.

Thus an end was reached to the first determined attempt of the Germans to bring the Commission and the Comité National under more complete control, and to use their work as a means of coercing the unemployed in Belgium to accept employment from the army or military authorities in Belgium.

The need for readjustment of the relations with the German Authorities.—By the end of the summer the central crop commission had been established and was at work, and the relations between the German authorities and the relief organisations were thus greatly increased in number and complexity. The creation of the ship-owning department of the Comité National in October similarly increased the pressure on the relationship existing between the occupying authorities and the relief bodies. It soon became evident that a readjustment was necessary. Later in the fall further serious difficulties arose which led to the creation by the Germans of a central office for the handling of all negotiations and correspondence between the relief organisations and the German Government. But, as this step was the result of a later series of events, the organisation of the 'Vermittlungsstelle,' will be discussed in the next chapter.

#### DIFFICULTIES WITH THE COMITÉ NATIONAL

A Belgian view of the Relief Work.—It has already been indicated that the cooperation of the Comité National and the Commission was not without its difficulties, and that these organisations frequently found themselves taking decidedly different attitudes on important questions. The Comité National, or rather its guiding spirits, had from the first assumed that the work of relief was a purely Belgian affair, to be directed only by Belgians. The aid of Mr. Hoover and of the American Commission was welcomed universally and enthusiastically in Belgium, but the leaders of the Comité National did not intend that the Commission or its representatives should have any executive voice in the control of the distribution of food or of relief in Belgium. At first there was little difficulty. The country had been so near the threat of famine, the work of organisation was so difficult and so engrossing, that the Comité National and the Commission alike threw themselves wholeheartedly in the work of organisation. There had been, it is true, a certain initial friction between M. Francqui and Captain Lucey in November 1914, but this had smoothed over and by the middle of January the sky seemed perfectly clear and the relations of the Comité National with the Commission seemed the most pleasant imaginable.

Objections to control by the American Delegates.—Very soon, however, the activities of certain of the American delegates began to rather annoy and irritate certain of the members of the Comité National and of the provincial committees. These Belgians of prominent position and of standing in the community naturally found no very keen pleasure in having their ideas overruled and the conduct of their organisation controlled by striplings from across the seas who, though capable and amiable enough, yet had, as a rule, but little practical or business experience. Francqui and his associates did not object to the presence of Americans in Belgium, for they provided a very powerful support for

the Comité National, both in its relations with the Germans and in its relations with its subsidiary committees. The prestige of the Americans in Belgium was such that the Comité National found it advantageous to use this prestige for its own support in the minds of the people. But this very tendency on the part of the Belgian people, at the beginning of the work, to give America and the American Commission the credit for the whole of the relief work, for the organisation of distribution inside Belgium, as well as for the organisation of the supply service, did not greatly please the directing heads of the Belgian organisation, who had actually organised and set into operation the machinery of distribution.

**The use of the American Flag by the Commission.**—In January 1915, the question of how the dépôts of the Comité National and its sub-committees should be protected had led to the suggestion that the American flag should be put over all warehouses. At this time the Commission assumed that all supplies in the magazines and dépôts in Belgium were the property of the Commission and under the direct control of its delegates until such time as the food was actually distributed to the ultimate consumers. It therefore seemed logical that the Commission, since it was operating as the agent of Brand Whitlock, the American Minister, should put the American flag over the dépôts and warehouses of Belgium. After some discussion, however, it was at first decided that it would be inadvisable to use the American flag in this manner, and, accordingly, in the middle of January, the delegates were instructed not to fly flags on their automobiles or on the warehouses of the Comité. After a short while, however, the advantages which would be derived from thus emphatically designating the dépôts, as places enjoying a special protection, led the Commission, with the approval of the American Minister, to change its decision, and, in instructions sent out on February 5, the delegates were authorised to use the American flag for all warehouses and dépôts and for their automobiles.

**The American Stores.**—At the same time many of the warehouses were marked with signs bearing the name of the Commission for Relief in Belgium. A large quantity of sundry foods, such as tinned meats, fruit, and vegetables, coffee, tea, cocoa, breakfast foods, rolled oats, maple sugar, Oregon apples and other similar articles had come to Belgium in the first months among the supplies donated in America. It was found impossible for material reasons to distribute these gift foods to the destitute directly. There was not enough of most of the articles to provide for a general distribution, and the machinery necessary for keeping the donated food separate from the purchased food and of distributing it to the poor would have been so complicated and so unnecessarily clumsy that the Commission decided that in the case of the sundry foods, as with other supplies, the gift foods should be turned into a general stream of supplies and their estimated value should be credited to the 'departement de secours.' In the various provinces, therefore, considerable stores of these sundry supplies, mostly things which in Belgium were considered as articles of luxury, had to be distributed, and it was decided to open up special stores to sell these supplies for the benefit of the benevolent funds. These were commonly known as the 'Magasins Américains,' the 'American Stores.'

**The American Flag removed from the Warehouses.**—In the month of April there came considerable objection on the part of the Germans, as well as on the part of a few of the leaders of the Comité National, to this excessive use of the American flag and of every thing American in the relief work. The Commission, therefore, after some consideration, and on receiving instructions from the American Minister, sent out orders that the American

flag should be used only in the central warehouse in the chief place of each province, that all other warehouses and dépôts should be carefully marked by a white flag bearing on it in red letters the inscription 'Comité National de Secours et d'Alimentation.' These flags were provided by the clothing department of the Comité National and soon supplanted the American flag throughout the country. The process was accelerated by strict orders sent out by the Germans to local commandants stating that the American flag was no longer to be flown, save in the chief place of each province.

The Designation of the Commission also removed.—At about the same time the Commission, considering it unadvisable that the stores for the sale of sundry supplies should be specially marked 'American Stores,' requested the Comité National to discontinue the use of the term 'American Store' for these places. The Comité National interpreted this request very broadly, and in sending out instructions to the provincial and local committees, directed them to discontinue the use of the word American in everything having to do with the ravitaillement and to remove all signs from local dépôts and magasins bearing the name of the Commission for Relief in Belgium.

This was the first incident of a series of events which in the course of the succeeding months made many of the members of the Commission feel decidedly uncomfortable and embarrassed, because of the change in the attitude of the direction of the Comité National.

Reflections on the motives of the C.R.B.—During the spring months of 1915 persistent stories went about Belgium to the effect that the Commission was a huge trading organisation engaged in wringing profit from the unfortunate situation of the Belgians. At the end of April and again in May 1915, formal statements were read at the Comité National meetings, giving public praise to the Commission for its work, commending it for its efficiency and humanitarian endeavour and emphasising the fact that its purposes were purely charitable; but the very nature of these certificates of character from the Comité National gave credence rather than otherwise to the impression that the American Commission was exploiting Belgium. From the standpoint of human psychology there is much significance in the line of Shakespeare, 'He doth protest too much,' and in this case, since the protesting came, not from the Commission, but from an outside and interested party, it did little to check the impression.

Difficulties of the Crop Negotiations.—In May and in June there came further difficulties as a result of the attitude of the directors of the Comité National toward the question of the new harvest. The Commission, endeavouring to secure the produce of the Belgian soil for the civil population, made strong representations to the German Government to this end, backing up these representations with the threat of the British Government to stop the relief work in August if the Germans did not grant the guarantees demanded. The general feeling among the members of the Commission in May seems to have been that the work would end at the middle of August unless the Germans guaranteed to protect the new crop from requisitions.

The Belgians and the Commission take different attitudes.—The Belgians, however, took an entirely different attitude. They contended that the British Government had, in October 1914, given an unconditional promise that supplies could be sent to Belgium by the Commission, under the protection of the neutral diplomats, as long as the German authorities in Belgium respected the guarantees of October 16, 1914, of Baron von der Goltz, to the effect that all supplies so imported would be free from requisition and would be left at the exclusive disposal of the Comité National. They contended that England therefore

had no right to make new conditions for the continuance of the relief work. Hoover pointed out emphatically to Francqui that by taking this attitude the Belgians were merely recognising the Germans' claim that they had the right to take for their own use the whole of the Belgian harvest. Francqui, as he frankly stated in letters to Hoover, believed that the Germans would take the harvest and that there was no way to prevent them from doing it ; but that in any case the British Government ought to continue to permit the Commission to make imports. Thus at first in the matter of harvest negotiations Hoover and Francqui were working rather at cross purposes. Hoover endeavoured to coerce the German Government into granting the guarantee protecting the Belgian crop and Francqui endeavoured to bring such pressure to bear on the English Government that it would permit the relief work to go on even in case the Germans did take the harvest. Of course Hoover, and all the members of the Commission, would have supported Francqui's view if the Germans had taken the harvest and the only means of saving Belgium would have been the continuation of imports ; but so long as there was an opportunity to aid the Belgians by securing for them the supplies of their own soil, Hoover believed it his duty in the interest of the Belgian population to leave no effort untried, no means unused, to secure the necessary guarantees.

**Negotiations of June 1915.**—In June there came a long series of negotiations in Brussels between Hoover, representing the Commission, Francqui, representing the Comité National, the patron Ministers and the representatives of the German Government. Some of these conferences were devoted to the schemes which the Germans were then formulating for reorganising the relief work to their own taste ; other conferences were devoted to the question of the new crop, and still others to the question of financing the relief operations. At this time Francqui showed a greater tendency than before to work directly with the German authorities and to eliminate the Commission from consideration. His attitude seemed to have been at this time that the Comité National was able to carry on the work of relief ; that the British Government could be induced or coerced into accepting the assurances of the Comité National or of the patron Ministers that all was well in Belgium ; that the Commission should therefore become a mere purchasing agent for the Comité National, and that in Belgium it should be made use of as an additional protection of a diplomatic sort ; but that for all practical purposes the Comité National alone was to direct the relief operations.

**The Responsibilities of the Commission to the Allied Governments.**—Mr. Hoover and all his associates would have liked nothing better than to have laid down the heavy burden which the months had only increased, if they had seen any possible way of doing it. But Belgium had to be fed. The results already accomplished could not be lightly imperilled by the personal inclinations of the members of the Commission. Hoover himself had abandoned all his private interests to devote his whole time and energy to the work of the Commission. He knew that the attitude of the British was that without the Commission the relief work would be impossible. The British Foreign Office considered the Commission's assurance the only guarantee that it could have that the German promises were being kept. Hoover, having upon himself the responsibility thus imposed by the British, felt keenly that this responsibility could not be discharged unless the Commission had such a control over the relief operations as to make sure that the conditions of the allied governments were satisfied.

**The desire to Reduce the Authority of the C.R.B. in Belgium.**—With the organi-

sation of the central crop commission, there was indicated more clearly than ever the purpose of the Comité National to eliminate the Commission from all voice in affairs in Belgium. The Germans, in this matter, were thoroughly in accord with the leaders of the Comité National. The less influence Americans had in Belgium, the less the Commission had to do with the relief work, the better pleased were the Germans. Among the diplomatic patrons of the Commission, too, there was undoubtedly a certain jealousy at the predominant part played by America and Americans in the work of the Commission, and the Comité National was thus encouraged on many sides to eliminate the Commission as an effective factor in the relief work. In July the matter came to a head. Many important decisions had been taken by the Comité National in Belgium without consulting the Commission or heeding its advice and counsel. Mr. Hoover therefore came over in the middle of the month, accompanied by Mr. White and Mr. Rickard. Hoover found on his arrival in Brussels that Francoqui's attitude was apparently not to be changed and that he intended that the Commission should no longer have any real authority in Belgium. Hoover recognised that this would make impossible the accomplishment of the purposes for which the Commission existed, that if it could not have an effective control in Belgium it would be perfectly useless as an organisation.

**The Conference of July 20, 1915. The Commission offers to Withdraw.**—A very important meeting was finally arranged between Hoover and his associates and the members of the executive committee of the Comité National. At this meeting the representatives of the Commission suggested that the time had arrived when the retirement of the Commission from the relief work in Belgium should be considered. The reasons given were: First, that the Comité National had now a sufficient organisation and sufficient liberty of movement to no longer require the assistance of members of the Commission in building up and carrying on its organisation. Secondly, the Belgian people had so far recovered from the financial disorganisation of the first months of war as to be able with their own resources, and with the subsidy placed at their disposal by the Belgian Government, not only to finance the provisionment of Belgium, but also to undertake the care of the destitute, and that therefore at an early date no further appeals to the charity of the world would be necessary, or, even if necessary, could be made directly by the Comité National itself. Thirdly, the experience of eight months had shown that the Germans had strictly performed their undertakings in regard to the protection of imported foods; that the presence of a neutral commission was no longer indispensable; that the allied governments should be approached to accept the assurance of their own allies, the Belgians; and that the Comité National should be recognised as being the responsible agent for the enforcement of the guarantees. Fourthly, in view of the guarantees secured from the Germans as to the native food production, the activity of the Commission in attempting to protect native foods had become less important. In conclusion, Mr. Hoover and his associates stated that the sole object of the Americans in their work had been to help the Belgians; that, as the Belgian people now required no further help from any other nationality as a result of a betterment of the political situation, it appeared to the members of the Commission that they should undertake the necessary steps preliminary to retirement from Belgium. This retirement would necessarily be gradual, but could be finished by the middle of October, thus marking the completion of a year of service.

**The Comité National insists that the C.R.B. Continue its Activities.**—In reply to this statement on the part of the Commission, the Comité National declared that the



continuation of the Commission's activities were essential to the whole work, and that it was impossible that the Commission for Relief in Belgium should retire. The reasons given were : First, that the Belgians had no certainty of freedom of movement, communications or meetings ; that without this certainty they could not themselves carry out the large operations involved in the relief work. Secondly, the fact that the Commission was an independent neutral body, founded on purely humanitarian principles, made it indispensable that it should continue to act as the guardian of the Belgian people ; that the presence of its members in Belgium gave confidence and protection and an assurance of the continuation of the food-supply to the entire people ; that the American membership of the Commission and the support it had received the world over were in themselves guarantees that the stream of foodstuffs would not be interfered with by either of the belligerents. Thirdly, the Comité National believed that the problems which would arise in the future would require just as much moral and diplomatic support to reach a satisfactory solution as those which had been hitherto met. Fourthly, the disorganisation of Belgium still continued to make absolutely necessary the presence of a controlling body to give cohesion to the Belgian organisation, with its co-operating elements from the national and provincial committees to the communal committees ; without the influence and prestige enjoyed by the Commission the organisation in Belgium would soon break down. Fifthly, the financial resources were still precarious and might at any time again require the energetic intervention of the Americans, either in banking arrangements or in charity. Sixthly, the Comité National was certain that it could not go on with its work without, first, the political and moral support of the Commission ; secondly, the co-operation of the Commission in the executive work ; and third, the activities of the Commission in its financial, purchasing and transport services. The Comité National therefore specifically requested the Commission to indefinitely continue its activities.

The Agreement under which the C.R.B. decided to continue work.—This frank recognition by the Comité National of the importance and necessity of the functions of the Commission settled for a moment the questions which had arisen to create friction between the two organisations. It was decided at this meeting therefore that the Commission should continue its work in provisioning Belgium in co-operation with the Comité National.

A definite plan was drawn up to govern the relations between the Commission and the Comité National. It was provided that for administrative purposes the functions of both institutions should be continued in the following three departments : (a) the provisioning department, for the ravitaillement of the entire population ; (b) the benevolent department, for the care of the destitute ; (c) the exchange department, for facilitating financial operations.

The Provisioning Department.—In the administration of the provisioning department it was provided that the chief executives of the Comité National and the C.R.B. should determine in consultation from time to time the nature and quantities of foodstuffs to be purchased abroad, the prices at which they were to be sold by the C.R.B. to the Comité National and by it to the sub-committees and the public ; and the regulations for the general distribution throughout Belgium to the regional committees. It was provided expressly that the C.R.B. should deliver its supplies to the regional warehouses and that upon such delivery being made the responsibility of the C.R.B. should cease ; the whole of the distribution after that being undertaken by the Comité National and its subordinate committees.

The Benevolent Department.—In the administration of the benevolent funds it was agreed that the donations, together with the profits of the provisioning department of the Commission, should be remitted to the Comité National through the exchange department in the form of a monthly subvention of such an amount as might be from time to time determined by the executive heads of the two organisations. The Comité National should use these subventions to make allocations to its sub-committees ; it being understood that the local organisations should distribute relief in kind, i.e. in food and not in money. The Comité National was to furnish the Commission with a monthly statement, approved by the auditor of the Commission, as to the manner in which the benevolent funds were distributed. In the case of gifts of food received by the Commission, these were to be sold in the provisioning department at the replacement value and the sums represented should be included in the remittances to the Comité National for benevolent purposes.

The Exchange Department. —So far as the exchange department was concerned, a distinction was made between the three classes of exchange. There was first, commercial exchange, i.e. payments to be made by the Comité National to institutions or private individuals in Belgium against similar sums of money paid to the Commission abroad ; the second class were the benevolent funds which were to be transmitted to the Comité National in the manner above described ; thirdly, there were the remittances from the Belgian Government to the Comité National for the maintenance of the various types of special relief (*secours extraordinaire*). It was provided that the C.R.B. should take no responsibility whatsoever in regard to these last remittances, the Comité National undertaking to account to the Belgian Government for the distribution of the funds. It was stipulated that no money was to be remitted by the Commission, nor distributed by the Comité National, if either of the belligerent governments disapproved.

The relations between the C.R.B. and the C.N.—In order to establish a basis for co-operation between the Commission and the Comité National it was decided :

- (a) That the director and other members of the Commission should continue to act as members of the executive committee of the C.N.
- (b) The provincial delegates of the Commission should sit as members of all the committees, provincial, regional and communal, in their respective provinces.
- (c) The representatives of the C.N. should have the same relation to the C.R.B. in Rotterdam, London and New York.

In order to keep the accounts regulated, it was provided that they were to be adjusted each month and that the C.N. and the C.R.B. should both furnish audited statements as to their financial transactions as often as practicable.

This, then, was the agreement upon which the Commission was to continue its work. It is interesting to note that whereas in the beginning the Commission had retained control of the food to the time of its actual distribution, it was now provided that the Commission's control should not extend farther than the delivery to the regional warehouses. The whole question of the activity of the provincial delegates was left unsettled, except that it was provided that they should co-operate as closely as possible with the provincial committees.

The Internal Organisation of the C.R.B. in Belgium.—A document which was drawn up about this time, defining the organisation of the Commission in Belgium, gives a clear idea of the attitude taken by Mr. Hoover and his associates at this time, on the question of what the functions of the provincial delegate should be. This memorandum,

relating to the internal organisation and duties of the C.R.B., provided that the personnel in Belgium should consist of a director, a Brussels office with a chief inspector, a shipping manager and a secretariat, and the provincial offices under the supervision of the American delegates; in addition there were to be certain advisory members at Brussels. It was stated that 'the ravitaillement and the care of the destitute is a joint undertaking of the C.N. and the C.R.B., the definition of functions is difficult to define, but so far as the C.R.B. is concerned, the one dominating idea is simply to help the Belgians.

**The functions of the C.R.B. Delegates.**—'The work of the delegates falls into three main phases: (a) general service; (b) supervision of guarantees; (c) the handling of transportation and the gathering of statistics. The general duty of the provincial delegates are most difficult to define, but it is considered that for our purposes we should define a minimum of absolute duties and that any further activity should only be undertaken at the request of the provincial committee or its sub-committees themselves. It may be stated in general that this minimum is intended to entirely exclude, as soon as possible, executive and office functions. Furthermore, it is our own desire that there shall be no dictation to the provincial committees and no dictation to sub-committees and individuals, unless at the request of the superior committees themselves; we are here to help, not to order.

'The prime and most important functions of the delegate is to maintain representation in the provinces of the guardian neutral body, and to exemplify its ideals in constantly rendering aid and moral support to the people in their difficulties in connection with the ravitaillement and the care of the destitute. Particularly, it is to be assumed that the whole of the committee structure engaged in this work is now developed to a stage where it will function by itself except for occasional difficulties. It is the desire of the directors to strongly impress delegates with the fact that they consider the time has come when the delegates should not occupy themselves with any executive functions, should reduce their office routine to a minimum, and should devote themselves to helping at difficult points and discovering violations of the Commission's principles and undertakings. It is our desire that the delegates should move frequently and freely over their entire areas, in constant consultation with all committees involved in this work, giving them such aid and advice as may seem appropriate, but under no circumstances to give direction unless requested by a superior committee to give orders.'

**The Commission's part in the Relief Work.**—It was definitely provided that if the delegates met difficulties they could not themselves overcome they should make a report to the Brussels office, where the matter would be dealt with by the director. 'It does not appear to us that the Commission is from now on concerned in enforcing any Draconian scheme of rationing the population, so long as there is no real privation and no injustice. The most valued function of the Commission, and the one for which it will stand out in the memory of the Belgian people, is the relief of the destitute—that is, together with the political phases mentioned, the prime *raison d'être* of the Commission—but in this matter, as in the ravitaillement generally, we believe that the attitude of the delegates should be entirely of the order of inspection and advice and not of executive action. The directors believe that with the abandonment of executive work the delegates will have more time at their disposal in which to visit the various branches of the organisation to study the results. In order to maintain the intimate relations of the provincial delegates with the provincial committees, they will sit as members of all the committees in their

provinces, but it is distinctly understood on both sides that they have no responsibility for any action ; that their position is purely advisory. The relation of the delegates to the local German authorities shall be purely one of a friendly intermediary.'

The Enforcement of the Guarantees.—The memorandum went on to discuss the guarantees and the part of the delegates in supervising their enforcement. These guarantees were described as of two sorts : those against military interference and those of justice in distribution. In the first case the delegates should have a purely passive function and should investigate and report to the directors in Brussels violations of the guarantees by the German military. In the matter of ensuring fair distribution, the Commission had the duty of retaining possession of the foodstuffs until their final delivery in regional warehouses, and the shipments should be handled by the delegates until the food reached the warehouses, at which point the responsibility ended. The delegates should secure from the provincial committees statistical information about the distribution, and should assure themselves and the Commission that the distribution was being made impartially. They were given, however, no power of intervening personally to make sure that the food distribution did go on fairly.

Effect of the New Instructions.—Thus, in a general way, it can be said that the Commission in July 1915 definitely adopted, so far as the provincial delegates were concerned, the attitude taken by Connett and approved by Francqui : viz., that the Commission should be a purely advisory and diplomatic body in so far as its relations with the problems of food distribution were concerned ; that by the presence of its delegates the Commission should throw the weight of its prestige behind the Belgian committees and should give the work in this way an aided protection and sanction. The view of a number of the provincial delegates, that efficiency in the work could only be secured if the delegates were to be given authority to take executive action, was thus definitely overruled. As a matter of fact the provincial delegate remained in about the same position after these instructions as previously. In the provinces in which the American delegate had played an important part in directing the details of the distribution, he continued to do so, because the system of distribution that had been built up made his activity an essential and integral part of the machinery for distribution. In other provinces, where the committees had themselves done the work, with only nominal supervision by the delegate, the position of the delegate was equally unchanged. This memorandum did, however, strengthen the hands of that group in the comité exécutif of the Comité National which objected to any sort of American interference in the actual work in Belgium. The conflict of authority and the incipient friction between the two organisations was therefore postponed rather than removed.

Plans for the Second Winter's Work.—The general plans for the co-operation of the Commission and the Comité National during the second year's work were finally agreed upon by Francqui and Hoover on August 20, 1915. It had been decided in the month of June that the imports of the Commission after that date should be limited to wheat, rice, maize, peas, beans, bacon and lard. It was provided also that the Commission would make only such imports as were recommended from the Brussels office. All the food and clothing to be imported was turned over to the Comité National for general distribution and no shipments of food would be accepted for delivery to particular places, institutions or persons in Belgium.\*

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\* Notice posted in the Rotterdam office June 26, 1915, signed by Hoover.

In June, however, no agreement had been made as to the disposition of the relief funds. This matter was settled at the conference on August 20. It was decided that all funds received by the Commission abroad and remitted into Belgium in the form of food would be divided into three parts according to the manner of distribution and of the equivalents of the sums received. These were: benevolent relief, financial relief and the ordinary commercial exchange.

**Allocation of the Benevolent Funds.**—It was decided to divide the benevolent relief fund into three parts. A certain proportion of the benevolent fund was to be turned over to general committees in the form of regular subsidies. These general committees included the comité agricole, the central clothing establishment, clothing workshops, the lace committees and the special committees organised for the purpose of relieving the needs of certain special classes of the population such as the children, refugees, foreigners, artists, physicians and pharmacists. It was decided that the total of appropriations to these general committees should not exceed 1,900,000 francs monthly.

The greater part of the benevolent relief fund was to be distributed in the form of subsidies from the Comité National to the provincial committees and from them to the local committees for distribution to the various classes in need of relief. For the support of the canteens throughout Belgium a sum not exceeding four and a half million francs a month was to be appropriated and divided between the provinces in such a way as to supplement the resources of each communal committee with the minimum necessary to enable them to carry on their work. A special appropriation of from 200,000 to 500,000 francs a month was provided for the erection of temporary shelter in those communities in which a considerable proportion of houses had been destroyed. For relief to the families of soldiers a maximum of six million francs a month was to be appropriated. This was to be distributed by paying allowances of 75 centimes per day to dependent adults, 25 centimes to children and 50 centimes additional to each dependent relative who lived with the family. To provide for the payment of the unemployed benefit allowance, a maximum of twelve million francs a month was set aside. It was provided that a maximum of 3 francs a week should be paid to each unemployed workman, with a supplement of fr. 1.50 per week for his wife and 50 centimes per week for each child under 16 years of age. These payments were to be made in the form of coupons issued by the communal committees and available for the purchase of certain commodities from accredited tradesmen or from the communal dépôts. The coupons were to be redeemed in cash by the local committees, but no money was actually to be paid out to the unemployed, except for the 10 per cent. of the allowance which was contributed by the commune. Appropriations of 150,000 francs a month were also decided upon for the support of philanthropic institutions for the care of the feeble-minded.

**Relief to the Professional Classes.**—In addition to these forms of charitable relief it was also agreed that it was necessary to provide some special means of aiding those members of the professional classes reduced to destitution by the conditions of the war. The people thus to be aided included school-teachers, the families of absent or dead officers and the employees of the Belgian state. No fixed sum was established for the individual payments. It was decided that the amount to be paid weekly should be determined in each individual case in accordance with the position and needs of the persons concerned. The aid to school-teachers and families of officers was not to exceed 600,000 francs monthly in all, while the aid to civil servants was not to exceed four million francs a month.

It was decided also to give financial relief to people temporarily embarrassed financially who yet owned property which could be used as security for loans. It was decided that a maximum sum of two million francs a month would be advanced to the Caisse de Prêts, to be loaned at a rate of low interest to necessitous persons who could give security.

The ordinary commercial exchange was also considered as one of the means of providing relief, and small remittances were to be especially encouraged from people abroad to their families or friends in Belgium.

The Finances of the Relief Work.—By this program it was believed that the charitable activities of the Commission and the Comité National would effectively relieve the greatest needs of the population in Belgium and would prevent any real suffering among any class of the population.

The sums thus provided for made a total of 31,350,000 francs a month. Twenty-five million francs of this came from the subsidy granted by the Belgian Government, the balance was to be paid from the ordinary benevolent fund derived from gifts or from the profits gained on the sale of foodstuffs in Belgium.

After some further negotiations in London, it was finally arranged that the subsidy from the Belgian Government should remain the same, viz., £1,000,000 or 25,000,000 francs a month for the ensuing year. It was believed that this sum would be ample both to provide for the purchase of food abroad to be shipped to Belgium, and through the sums received in Belgium from the sale of this food, to cover the appropriations to be made by the Comité National in Belgium to maintain the charitable department of its organisation.

#### THE WORK IN NORTHERN FRANCE TO THE END OF 1915

The Smooth Running of the work in France.—The organisation put into operation in the occupied districts of the North of France was soon functioning very satisfactorily. For the first two months Mr. Chadbourn was the chief representative of the Commission in Northern France. He was assisted by F. Van Bree, who also spent most of these two months at Charleville, as the representative of the Comité National. The plans for the general direction of the relief operations in France were soon carefully worked out.

Mr. Chadbourn was compelled to return to America in July, and was succeeded as chief representative by Professor Vernon L. Kellogg, of Stanford University. Dr. Kellogg had studied in German Universities and was acquainted therefore with the German language and with German habits and ideas. With an admirable gift for diplomacy, and with the ingratiating tact which marked all his activities on behalf of the Commission, he proved to be a most admirable man for the direction of the intricate affairs of the Commission in Northern France. It was chiefly through his efforts that the Germans in July and August agreed to turn over to the French population a ration of 100 grams of flour and 200 grams of potatoes per day.

During the whole of the first year of the Commission's work in Northern France no really serious difficulties arose between the Commission and the German authorities as to the work there. The troublesome petty difficulties which led to constant friction in Belgium with the authorities there were obviated in France through the close co-operation of the American delegates and the German officers in the work.

The part of the French Committees.—The distribution of food and the general handling of the relief operations was in the hands of the French committees, who threw

themselves into the work with a devotion and an efficiency which guaranteed success from the outset. Few of the services rendered by members of belligerent nations to their countrymen during the war are more praiseworthy than the activities of these French committees in the occupied districts. With practically no personal liberty, with no facilities for communication, subject to constant interference from local German commandants, they yet cheerfully and successfully carried into effect the program for the distribution of food. The fact that in France the distribution was made officially by the communes made a more effective control of the operations possible than was the case in Belgium, and the American delegates met with few complaints in their journeys about their districts as to manner of food distribution. The success of the work in France was to a very large extent due to these French committees.

The Ration to be Distributed in France for 1915-1916.—When the agreement was made with the German authorities for the establishment of the ration for the year 1915-16, the Commission agreed, in return for the German concession of 100 grams of flour and 200 grams of potatoes per day *per capita*, to increase the ration of imported foodstuffs. A program was drawn up by the Commission which called for a ration of the following foodstuffs:

Flour	..	..	..	..	150 grams per day.
Rice	..	..	..	..	20 " " "
Beans and peas	..	..	..	..	20 " " "
Coffee	..	..	..	..	20 " " "
Salt	..	..	..	..	10 " " "
Sugar	..	..	..	..	10 " " "
Lard	..	..	..	..	30 " " "
Bacon	..	..	..	..	30 " " "

Need for an increased Subsidy for Northern France.—The total cost of this ration to the consumer was estimated at 35 centimes per day, or approximately 10 francs per month. The Commission therefore estimated that it would require a sum of approximately 22 million francs per month to provide regularly this ration. Since no money whatsoever could be exported from France, and since it was equally impossible, because of the military conditions, to secure any exchange on this sum, it was necessary to secure the money abroad in the form of governmental subsidies. Negotiations were therefore undertaken with the French and Belgian Governments to secure an increase in the subsidy through the Belgian Government to the Commission for the support of the French relief work. Under the arrangements agreed upon in March, the Commission had received from March to August a total of 75 million francs, i.e. a monthly subsidy of  $12\frac{1}{2}$  million francs. An increase of  $7\frac{1}{2}$  million francs in the monthly subsidy was the minimum on which the Commission could carry out its new program. The rapid exhaustion of the native food-supplies made it necessary for the Commission to plan to import practically the whole of the food-ration for three-fourths of the population of the occupied French regions. Nearly one million people were living in urban industrial areas, where even vegetables and supplies such as milk and eggs were lacking, and were consequently completely dependent upon the Commission. Hoover communicated this situation to the Belgian Minister of Finance on July 12, 1915, on returning from a visit to Brussels. While in Belgium he had made a trip to the general headquarters and throughout considerable portions of the French occupied territory. He realised that the problem was one of larger extent than

the Commission had anticipated and, in his letter to the Belgian Minister of Finance, he emphasised the fact that the situation was growing more difficult in France and that it would be absolutely necessary to increase the subsidy for the French relief work.

At about the same time M. Guerin, President of the Comité d'Alimentation du Nord de la France, was permitted by the German authorities to go to Paris in order to add his influence to the negotiations which the Commission were undertaking to secure an increased ration for the civil population of Northern France.

**The Increased Subsidy granted.**—Early in August Mr. Hoover went to Paris and in a series of conferences there succeeded in making satisfactory arrangements for the continuation and increase of the subsidy. It was agreed that a sum of approximately 22 million francs, or such less amount monthly as the Commission might ask for, should be paid by the Belgian Government to the Commission, the first instalment being payable in September. M. Francqui, who had come out of Belgium to assist in the negotiations for the continuation of the subsidies for the support of the provision in Belgium, aided also in working out the financial arrangements for the subsidy for France. The financial measures in connection with the French relief work were carefully discussed and certain readjustments made in the manner of making payments, of accounting for the sums advanced and of securing from the communes in France acknowledgments of their indebtedness for the value of the food delivered to them.

**The New Ration put into effect.**—As soon as the arrangements made for the continuation of the subsidy were made known in occupied France, the German headquarters immediately issued orders carrying into effect their promises to deliver rations of flour and potatoes to the civil population, and the new ration was put into effect on September 1. The ration given above was maintained in general throughout the winter, but occasionally shortages in arrivals made it necessary to temporarily reduce the individual rations of certain foods. When the difficulties arose in December 1915 over the question of the bacon and lard shipments of the Commission, the bacon and lard ration for France was cut down 50 per cent., and for a time the supplies were not sufficient even to permit the issuance of a total ration of 30 grams per day of bacon and lard.

**Financial arrangements for the Northern France work.**—In accordance with the agreements made with the French and Belgian Governments and the Comité National, Mr. Hoover put into effect on September 16 a set of regulations for the financial side of the provision of Northern France. It was arranged that from September 1 the C.N. should invoice to the C.F. (Comité Français) all the goods at the same price charged by the C.R.B. to the C.N. It was considered advisable for the C.F., as far as possible, not to purchase from the Belgian provincial committees, since these committees were charged by the C.N. higher prices than in the case of goods supplied by the C.N. to the C.F. It was arranged that the Comité Français should reimburse the Comité National for all expenses incurred by the C.N. in delivering goods to France before September 1. After September 1 the C.N. would send a monthly bill to the C.F. for these expenses. It was decided also that the milling of wheat for the French districts should be done in a few mills in Belgium under contracts with the C.R.B. and that these mills should be placed under the control of the Comité Français. As the most favourable terms could be secured at the mills in Louvain, it was considered advisable to do as much of the milling for Northern France at Louvain as was possible. Such Belgian native supplies as were purchased for shipment to France should be bought under the direction of M. Le Blan, the delegate of the Comité



Français at Brussels. A monthly report of these purchases would be supplied to the Commission and to the Comité National.

It was decided also that for the time being the Comité Français should bill the food-supplies to the district committees at the same prices at which the goods were originally delivered to the C.N. by the C.R.B. In this way the actual cost of the rations in France could be kept at the lowest possible figure.

**Changes in Personnel.**—The personnel of the Commission changed considerably during the summer of 1915 and this change affected France as well as Belgium. Most of the men who had gone to France in April as the first delegates of the Commission had, for one reason or another, left France before September 1, but the new delegates continued to maintain the traditions of the Commission and to exercise an effective control over the operations in France.

## CHAPTER IX

## THE COMMISSION'S WORK IN 1915

*(continued)*

## THE REORGANISATION OF THE NEW YORK OFFICE

The work of the New York Office during 1914-15.—The problem of the American branch of the Commission's organisation continued, even after the organisation of the Commission's New York office, to be a rather difficult one. There were, as has already been pointed out, a great number of committees organised in the different parts of the United States to collect relief funds for the Belgians. These committees worked together for the most part, under the supervision of the New York office, with a fair degree of co-ordination. During the first winter 1914-15 the campaign for Belgian relief brought in contributions in money, food and clothing of a value of some \$6,000,000. Special shipments were collected in a number of the states and were sent over in special ships which bore the name of the state that had contributed the cargo. The benevolent department of the Commission therefore had amply justified its existence. It had provided more than half of the funds necessary for the continuance of the ordinary relief, i.e. for the gratuitous food distribution to the destitute inside Belgium; but, in the spring, the gifts to Belgian relief decreased greatly and fell to an almost negligible quantity.

The Necessity of gaining greater Recognition for the C.R.B. in America.—Through the activities of the men who had volunteered their services for the New York office, the organisation of the shipping and purchasing departments had very early reached a high degree of efficiency. As the Commission's work increased, and especially after the arrangement made for the payment of regular governmental subsidies to the Commission to provide the greater part of the finances necessary, the responsibilities of the Commission and of its New York office correspondingly increased. This made it necessary that the Commission should have the strongest possible backing both of a financial and diplomatic sort in America, and as the early months of 1915 passed it became more and more apparent that the New York office must be strengthened by securing for it official recognition and increased prestige. The first director of the New York office, Mr. Lindon W. Bates, had thrown himself energetically into the work from the beginning, but the strain and the responsibility told greatly upon him, and in the spring of 1915 he was compelled to give up part of his work. A great tragedy which came upon him when his son, Lindon W. Bates, junior, was lost in the 'Lusitania' while *en route* to Europe in the service of the Commission, also naturally reacted tremendously upon him.

Personal Friction and Difficulties in the New York Office.—In order to relieve Mr. Bates from some of the strain of the office, Hoover asked Captain Lucey, on returning to America in February, to assist in the New York office. Friction soon arose, however, between Bates and Captain Lucey, and Captain Lucey withdrew. In April, Hoover made a new effort to more closely co-ordinate the New York and London offices by sending over

Colonel Hunsiker, who had rendered great service in the London office of the Commission. He succeeded in working out a plan for the co-ordination of the various personalities in New York engaged in Belgian relief, but encountered considerable difficulty through Mr. Bates's opposition to his arrangements. From the very beginning of the work of the New York office there had been a certain amount of personal friction between Mr. Bates and the New York Committee for Belgian Relief. Colonel Hunsiker tried especially to find a solution for the difficulties and to bring about a complete co-ordination of effort. But in view of Mr. Bates's objections to Colonel Hunsiker's plans for the reorganisation of the work in America, it was decided that, as the Commission would probably only continue its work for a few months in any case, it would be useless to attempt any change, and consequently matters were left as they were.

The reorganisation of the New York Office.—In March Mr. Hoover, in order to secure greater efficiency in the New York office, had appealed to Mr. Hemphill, chairman of the Guarantee Trust Company, to become the treasurer of the New York office and to supervise its financial transactions in America. This Mr. Hemphill agreed to do, and from the time of his intervention there was no question as to the efficient administration of the commercial side of the work. In the late summer of 1915 it became apparent that Mr. Bates, because of overwork and his personal sorrow, was showing signs of an imminent breakdown. The men in the London office of the Commission became greatly alarmed at the possibilities of great difficulties for the Commission if Mr. Bates continued in the direction of the New York office. Finally, in October, it became necessary for Mr. Hoover to go personally to America to handle the situation. There he soon perceived that in order to secure for the Commission in America the backing necessary, in view of the semi-diplomatic position of the Commission in Europe, it would be necessary to secure the strongest official backing. Mr. Hoover therefore decided to appeal to President Wilson and to request him to appoint a committee to act as the executive board of the Commission in America. After several conferences at Washington, it was finally decided that President Wilson should ask a number of distinguished men in New York to act as an executive committee for the New York office. The President assured Hoover that he and the whole of his administration thoroughly appreciated the importance and significance of the work of the Commission and would support it in all its actions. The men designated for the executive committee at once accepted the invitation, and in meetings held with Mr. Hoover early in November the arrangements were made for the reorganisation of the New York office and for the carrying out of the Commission's work in America. It was arranged that the new committee should supplant the former so-called executive committee in New York, and that Mr. John B. White should become the director of the Commission in New York subject to the new committee. Mr. Bates agreed to withdraw from his position and the matter was finally settled.

On November 9 a letter of President Wilson inviting the members of the new committee to take part in the direction of the American affairs of the Commission was published throughout the United States, and the Commission was thus given the strongest official recognition and backing by the chief executive of the United States.

The new campaign for the Benevolent Funds.—The new organisation worked out for the New York office was at once put into operation. The publicity and purchase departments were reorganised and strengthened, and it was decided to undertake a new campaign in America to be directed chiefly to the securing of clothing or of money to purchase

clothing. It was stated that sufficient funds had been secured in Europe to provide for the purchases of the necessary food for the people of Belgium and France, but that there was no money available to secure the clothing which would be so badly needed during the winter. An energetic campaign was made by the reorganised committees formed in the different states and cities of America with the result that clothing to the value of \$500,000 and money amounting to \$1,250,000 was secured before March 1, 1916.

**The Committee appointed by President Wilson.**—The men appointed by President Wilson to act as the executive committee in America were all men of standing and position and contributed a great deal to the strengthening of the Commission's position. These men were: Alexander J. Hemphill, John Beaver White, S. Reading Bertron, C. A. Coffin, R. Fulton Cutting, Elbert H. Gary, Henry L. Stimson, Oscar S. Straus, Frank Trumbull and Frank A. Vanderlip.

#### THE FORMATION OF THE SHIPOWNING DEPARTMENT. (S.O.D.)

**Transport into Belgium by Canal.**—From October 1914 to October 1915 the Commission had been able to make its shipments into Belgium over the canals with lighters chartered in Rotterdam. At first the Rotterdam office had had no difficulty in securing under favourable conditions the fleet of approximately 600 lighters that were needed to move into Belgium the monthly shipments which ranged from 60 to 120,000 tons; but, as the first year of work drew to a close, the Commission began to experience extreme difficulty in securing the necessary lighters. In September and October 1915, when the shipments in Rotterdam began to increase as a result of the putting into effect of the shipping program for the year 1915-16, it became quite impossible to secure sufficient lighters to move the important quantities of supplies which were then arriving. Important stocks of wheat, bacon and lard began to accumulate in Rotterdam, at the same time that the stocks in the warehouses of Belgium and Northern France began to diminish in disquieting proportions.

**The difficulty of securing Lighters and Tugs.**—This shortage of tugs and lighters was due to a variety of causes. A large number of boats had left Holland as a result of purchases from abroad. Many of the boats, which had been the first year engaged in the ordinary carrying traffic between Belgium and Holland, were being held up in the Belgian coal-mining centres waiting for cargoes and were kept lying idle in those places for considerable periods. Furthermore, the lightermen in Holland, annoyed at the success of the Commission in securing lighters at practically their own terms, had begun to form a combination directed against the Commission and to stand out for exorbitant tonnage charges. There was at the end of September 1915 what practically amounted to a strike on the part of the lightermen, a great many of whom refused to recharter under the old conditions. The Commission therefore realised the urgency of providing its own method of transport which would be sufficient to assure the regularity of shipments to Belgium. After a considerable amount of discussion with the comité exécutif of the Comité National at Brussels, it was decided that the matter should be taken up with the comité provincial at Antwerp. The provincial committee of Antwerp had organised as a co-operative society under Belgian law and consequently possessed the necessary legal powers to carry on trading operations and to acquire and operate ships. It possessed also enough capital to undertake the purchase of a sufficient number of ships to move the Commission's supplies. The comité provincial

voluntarily agreed to create the organisation to carry out this program and undertook the immediate study of the question.

**Negotiations with the Germans in regard to Canal Transportation.**—The Commission immediately began negotiations with the German Government to secure from them a guarantee that its lighters and tugs should be free from any requisition, and that Belgian lighters and tugs in Holland would be permitted to go to Belgium with Commission cargoes and to return freely to Holland. The Commission also asked that two Belgian representatives of the Commission's shipping organisation should be permitted to have passports for Holland for the purpose of making purchases of equipment and for organising the Commission's transport service. A guarantee was asked that in the case of purchase of equipment in Holland this should be free from requisition, and that the Commission should further have the right to resell such equipment in Holland. The Germans had previously required that in the case of lighters which had been chartered in Belgium to carry cargoes for the Commission from Rotterdam to Belgium a deposit should be made in each case to guarantee the return of the lighter to Belgium. The Commission now proposed that a single guarantee of 100,000 francs should be given to the Germans as a general caution for all Belgian lighters and tugs in the service of the Commission. The Commission requested that the German authorities should give to the Commission a detailed statement in writing of the exact formalities to be complied with by the lightermen in passing the frontiers and in registering.\*

**German Guarantees relative to Lighters and Tugs.**—General von Bissing, replying to these requests from the Commission on October 29, gave a guarantee that Belgian boats chartered in Holland should not be requisitioned for military purposes while making trips for the Commission, and that these Belgian boats would be allowed to return to Holland if provided with a certificate issued by the German authorities in Holland stating that they had been in Holland before October 9, 1914. The Governor-General declined to grant the Commission the right to buy Belgian boats in Holland, for, as he said, 'it would probably not be to the interest of Belgium for Belgian boats to be sold to foreigners.' He consented that a general guarantee-bond from the Commission would be accepted as a caution for all Belgian ships going from Belgium to Holland. He further said he would simplify as far as possible the formalities required for the passing of the frontier, and stated that he would welcome proposals to this end from the Commission.

The Commission accordingly, on November 5, wrote making proposals as to the method of issuing passports and the general regulation of transportation. The delay on the part of the Germans in taking action on the Commission's suggestions led to the writing of the letter by Mr. Poland, referred to in a later section, which aroused such a storm of injured feeling among the ranks of the German dignitaries of the political department.

**The Plans for the creation of a Special Service of Canal Transport.**—The Antwerp provincial committee, acting on the proposals made to it by the Commission and the Comité National, immediately began to make arrangements to create a transportation service to take care of shipments inside Belgium. The Commission proposed to make shipments in large lighters to Antwerp; the cargoes could be transhipped there into smaller lighters, to be provided by the Antwerp committee, to carry the food to the various destination points. By the beginning of November the Rotterdam office had begun to despatch 1,000

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\* Letter of the Commission to the Governor-General, October 26, 1915.

and 1,500-ton lighters to Antwerp. The Antwerp committee chartered the first lighter on November 4. This was loaded with a cargo of 295 tons of wheat for Hainaut. The transport service was thus inaugurated. A few days later, on November 11, 1915, an agreement was signed by the Comité National and the comité provincial of Antwerp, relating to the transport service. The Société Co-operative of Antwerp agreed 'to create and to administer, on behalf of the Comité National, a department for supplying means of transportation to operate over the inland waterways; to acquire for this purpose the lighters and other special boats judged necessary by the Commission for Relief and the Comité National; and to carry out all the commercial operations involved therein.'

The creation of the Shipowning Department.—The shipowning department was officially created on November 13, and from that date assumed the task of providing the necessary lighters. At first enormous difficulties had to be contended with. The shipowning department found it very difficult to purchase lighters outright, and had finally to agree to make their purchases on a contract reserving to the sellers the right to buy back their ships at the conclusion of the war. As a corollary to this contract there had also to be accepted an agreement providing for the hiring of the boat's former proprietor to take charge of the navigation of his own craft. The lightermen, ignorant, avaricious, suspicious and conservative, as a Flemish peasant nearly always is, could not understand the real purpose of the contract drawn up by the shipowning department. They were willing to charter their boats to the Commission, but did not wish to sell them and they first saw in the proposition of the shipowning department nothing but an attempt to obtain possession of their boats for speculative purposes. The result was that the first negotiations with some fifty bargemen fell to the ground and the boatmen in the port of Antwerp revolted against the form of contract devised. It was also found difficult to handle the situation because of the complex system of mortgages and assurances made abroad or in inaccessible parts of Belgium for many of the lighters. The delays in correspondence and the difficulties in obtaining passports contributed to render negotiations difficult and laborious. At first it was only possible to move the supplies that came from Rotterdam by chartering from day to day the necessary tonnage for single journeys, but these charterings were a serious disadvantage. They led to a rapid rise in freight-rates and reduced the chances of purchase, as well as increasing the prices that had to be offered to effect purchases. It was not until November 29 that the first boat could be purchased. When the department became better organised, and the lightermen came to understand its functions better, the difficulties gradually lessened. In December 1915, 21 steel-lighters were purchased, but in the purchase-contracts the shipowning department had to guarantee a fixed figure of daily return to the lightermen.

The Germans give Trouble.—As soon as the purchases were officially known, the department encountered administrative difficulties. The Recorder of Deeds and Mortgages was forbidden by the German civil administration to enter on his registers the purchases of the department and this prohibition was maintained until April 1916. The issuance of the manifests permitting the lighters to leave port was forbidden and this measure inflicted frequent demurrage, amounting in one case to 89 days. Finally, the authorities decided to make a general replacement of the manifests by a German form and all lighters were held up in port until these documents could be made out in Brussels.

A further difficulty arose when, after a preliminary warning, the Civil Governor of Antwerp, on January 2, 1916, issued an order formally forbidding the department to purchase lighters. The coal centrale, organised by the Germans for the control of the Belgian coal

supply, was at this time creating a shipowning department of its own, and they feared that the shipowning department at Antwerp would buy up too many boats. They intimated, however, that they hoped to secure sufficient boats to be able to provide the Commission and the Comité National with all the lighters they needed. A short while later a further order was issued forbidding the shipowning department to charter lighters in the etapes. This caused further difficulty and annoyance, but was finally revoked at the end of April. The shipowning department, forbidden to purchase lighters, had no resource left but to make time-charters for fairly long terms with option of renewal from month to month.

Although restricted by these various orders and regulations, the shipowning department was yet able, by the month of May 1916, to make certain of 116 lighters for the service of transporting relief supplies.

**Bonds required for use of Belgian Lighters.**— After long and complicated negotiations an agreement was reached with the Germans, January 17, 1916, through the medium of the Comité National and the Commission, by which a security fund of 100,000 marks was deposited at the Banque Nationale in favour of the German Government in Belgium as a guarantee that the Belgian lighters chartered in Belgium by the shipowning department would return to Belgium if permitted to go to Holland. Further delays were encountered in satisfying the numerous formalities, and it was not until February 25 that the first lighter was sent from Antwerp to reinforce the Rotterdam fleet. After that time about 40 lighters a month were sent out of Belgium to bring back cargoes from Rotterdam. The shipowning department protected itself from loss on the guarantee by requiring security from lighters or by taking out mortgages on them. Similar arrangements were made to cover the guarantees deposited to insure the return of the Belgian lightermen making up the crews of the lighters sent to Holland.

Long delays were often experienced in obtaining the necessary passports, and all Belgian lightermen underwent a strict quarantine of four days before being allowed to proceed to Holland.

**Achievements of the Shipowning Department.**— By the end of May the fleet of the shipowning department was composed of 29 tugs and 137 lighters, with a total capacity of 45,360 tons. This is probably the largest single enterprise in the organisation of water transport that had ever been formed in Belgium. Seventy-six of the barges carried provisions directly from Rotterdam, while 61 made trips from Antwerp to destination points in Belgium and the North of France. The capital provided for the enterprise was 800,000 francs. This was provided by the Comité National in accordance with the agreement with the Société Co-operative of Antwerp. In the purchase of 21 boats secured in December 1915 some 550,000 francs was expended. The general costs of chartering lighters were borne by the Commission, as was the case with lighters chartered from Rotterdam.

The shipowning department made it possible for the Commission to continue its shipments when local conditions made it practically impossible to secure otherwise the necessary tonnage. The shipowning department has since grown to even greater proportions and the greater part of the lighters in the service of the Commission are now provided by it.

## A PROPOSAL FOR THE REVIVAL OF INDUSTRY IN BELGIUM

**The Problem of Unemployment in Belgium.**—The effect of the war in paralysing Belgium's industries has already been described. The blockade automatically cut off all imports and exports, except for those under the auspices of the Commission and for the petty commerce carried on between Belgium and Holland, and Belgium and Germany. The inevitable result was that a great proportion of the labouring class of Belgium was soon practically destitute, because of enforced unemployment. In April 1915 over 700,000 workmen were inscribed on the lists of the communal relief committees in Belgium as being *chômeurs* (unemployed). But the distribution of relief funds to the unemployed and the continuance of the enforced idleness of the labouring classes produced a situation of the gravest danger to Belgium. In the first place, there was the ever-present threat on the side of the Germans that the unemployed workmen of Belgium would be forced to accept employment from the Germans. On the other hand, from the standpoint of Belgium's future, the problem was no less grave; for, if the workmen of Belgium, who before the war were among the most industrious and thrifty in Europe, should for a long period live in idleness, supported by charitable relief, they might come to be unwilling or incapable of returning to work or maintaining the same labour standard as before the war. Many of the leading business men and manufacturers in Belgium, aware of the peril, very early began to attempt to find some means by which the situation could be remedied.

**Requests for imports of Raw Materials through the C.R.B.**—During the first months of its activities the Commission received repeated requests from business men and industrial leaders in Belgium to import raw materials to permit Belgian industries to revive. The Commission, however, had constantly refused to make any such importations. The Germans on occupying Belgium had commandeered a certain proportion of the Belgian industrial establishments and had requisitioned a large percentage of the raw materials in Belgium. In the face of these facts the Commission felt that it could not endanger its existence by importing under its protection supplies which might be seized by the Germans and which would prove useful to them for military purposes.

**The proposal for the formation of a Neutral Industrial Commission.**—In the spring of 1915, when the Commission was endeavouring to discover some means by which the financial burden of the relief work could be permanently carried, there came another proposal which seemed very attractive, because, if it had been carried into effect, the problem of securing funds outside Belgium to purchase food would have been solved. At that time negotiations were begun between certain of the large Belgian industrial interests and important people in Holland, with the sanction of the German Government in Brussels, for the formation of a neutral industrial commission for Belgium. It was proposed that this commission should import the raw materials of industry to Belgium, distribute them among the industries of Belgium which agreed to accept the conditions imposed, supervise and control the manufacturing industries in the same way as the Commission for Relief in Belgium supervised the food distribution, and, finally, should export from Belgium the finished products for sale in neutral countries abroad. In this way Belgian industries would be revived, the unemployed workmen would again be given remunerative and productive employment, and the sales of the exported manufactures would provide a large credit for Belgium abroad, which would do much to relieve the financial situation and would permit the Commission to obtain credits to purchase foodstuffs in consideration



of paying to the manufacturers in Belgium, through the exchange department, the sums due to them abroad.

**The Aid of the Commission asked for.**—In the beginning the German Government in Brussels heartily supported these Belgian-Dutch negotiations and proposed to set up an industrial commission in Belgium, under the supervision of the General Government, to carry the scheme into effect. Before anything could be done, it was, of course, essential to secure the proper diplomatic agreements. It was necessary for Germany to give guarantees, similar to those already given for articles of food, before the allied governments could even be approached with a request to permit raw materials to go into Belgium. It was further necessary to obtain from the British Government the permission to make the importations and to carry out the financial transactions to make possible the work of the industrial commission. In view of the success which had attended the Commission's endeavours in negotiating diplomatic agreements with the belligerent powers, it was natural that the interested parties in Belgium and Holland should turn to the Commission to secure its support, or preferably its active co-operation, in the proposed industrial revival. At first the Commission did not view these proposals with favour, for, as Hoover wrote to the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs on June 26, 1915, the Commission had been established as a purely humanitarian effort, carried on by volunteers, to save Belgium from famine. Consequently, as Hoover explained: 'We do not feel that we are called upon to do further service than to see that the Belgians are supplied with the few standard commodities sufficient to support life and health. Therefore we propose to confine ourselves absolutely to the import into Belgium of wheat, rice, maize, bacon, lard, peas and beans, and possibly yeast.'

**The Commission's view of its Functions.**—Under the guarantees given to the British Government, the Commission, according to Hoover, had a real obligation to see that all supplies imported by it were distributed with justice and equity over the whole population. To effect this it had been necessary to make the distribution in the form of a ration spread over the entire population. If the Commission were to further lend its existence to the importation of a thousand sundry articles, the Commission would come into conflict with normal trading and would be compelled to adapt its machinery to purely commercial purposes. The Commission would therefore henceforward refuse absolutely to import any articles except those above mentioned. 'The whole question of trade between Belgium and Holland seems to me to be one which must be settled outside of this Commission.'

At this time Mr. Hoover and his colleagues of the Commission, while refusing to undertake any industrial importations themselves, favoured the proposed scheme for setting up a neutral industrial commission, under Dutch auspices, to undertake the importation of raw materials of industry and the exportation of the finished products.

**Hoover's Report on the Industrial Proposal.**—In answer to requests from the British Foreign Office for a report on the scheme for industrial revival in Belgium, Mr. Hoover sent to Lord Eustace Percy on July 4, 1915, a memorandum on the proposed neutral industrial commission for Belgium. He pointed out the unparalleled extent of the destitution in Belgium, due chiefly to unemployment, and said that the relief of the destitute necessarily brought about a close connection between the amount of unemployment and the whole question of provisionment of Belgium. 'If certain of the manufacturing industries could be rehabilitated, if their products could be exported, if the raw material could be imported, not only would the workmen be employed and thus taken off the relief side, but also a monetary balance would be created outside Belgium in favour of that

country. If such monetary balances were handed over to this Commission, foodstuffs could be purchased therewith and these balances paid to their owners in Belgium in Belgian paper currency from the food-sale receipts, and thus the problem of the ravitaillement of that portion of the population which can pay for its own food could to a large degree be made to revolve upon itself.

**The relation between Relief Work and Industrial Revival.**—Hoover pointed out that the enumeration of the unemployed had shown that there were in Belgium 760,000 idle workmen, with 270,000 women and 620,000 children dependent upon them; that the stagnation of industry, which had been practically complete for the last nine months, was working unfavourably to produce a moral and physical deterioration of the population. Hoover said that he was greatly impressed with the sincerity of the desire of General von Bissing and his associates in the civil administration to get these people back into some form of regular occupation. In Hoover's opinion the most practicable form of occupation for these unemployed was not to be found in public works or in other forms of 'relief' labour, but in the industries in which they were normally employed. Many of these industries were concerned with articles of a non-contraband character. Hoover believed that if the restrictions placed by the Allies could be relaxed to permit the exportation of these types of products, the scheme would meet no obstruction from the German authorities. But the question could not be considered as merely one of exports, since Belgium did not produce but imported the raw materials for its industries. Hoover continued: 'It is my strongest belief that the proposal from Holland for the creation of a neutral industrial commission, which could receive such exports, market them, and could also purchase and import raw material for the manufacturers, would not only be a move in the right direction, but would be the greatest contribution toward a relaxation of calls on our Commission in its work of provisioning the Belgian people. If such an institution were established, I cannot too strongly recommend that it should be stipulated that sums due abroad to Belgian individuals and firms as a result of their operations should be handed to this Commission.' He went on to explain the working of the Commission's exchange department, and said that if it should be stipulated that the exchange rate should be maintained at frs. 25.40 to the pound sterling, it would be a great step toward reviving normal conditions in Belgium. Further, if it were stipulated that the proportions of the exported manufactures destined for North and South America or other places abroad should be handed to the Commission for transportation from Dutch ports, the cost of transporting foodstuffs to Belgium would be considerably modified. If the funds due to Belgians in foreign countries should be transmitted into Belgium through the Commission, the objection of the Allies to the proposal on financial grounds would disappear.

Hoover, while in Brussels in July and again in August, had many long conferences with the Belgians and the Germans over the proposed industrial commission. As a result he reconsidered his previous objection to undertaking through the Commission the supervision of the scheme for industrial revival in Belgium. The British Government had intimated that they would approve the scheme only if it were under the auspices of and supervised by the Commission, whose energy and efficiency and fearless activity they had learned to admire and to trust.

**The Plan for an Industrial Section of the Commission.**—When Hoover returned to London in August 1915 he presented to the Foreign Office a memorandum of the proposed organisation of an industrial section of the Commission for Relief in Belgium.

In this memorandum he pointed out that the destitution in Belgium and the whole relief problem connected with it could only be met by the creation of productive employment in Belgium, and that this could only be done by stimulating manufactures and by securing permission to make non-contraband exportations from Belgium and to import the necessary raw material. Hoover also pointed out that, 'aside from its effect on unemployment and therefore on our work in Belgium, the opening of this trade is of importance to the allied governments because, whereas we now export from this country something like two million pounds in money per month to the Western hemisphere for foodstuffs, the stimulation of exports from Belgium would result in bringing back to this country, under the scheme which I propose, probably a greater sum than this, and any effect which we at present have on an adverse exchange position will have been neutralised.'

The proposed Agreement with the Belligerents. Hoover made the following proposals in regard to the activities of the industrial sections :

' 1. Through the Ambassadors who act as honorary chairmen of this Commission an agreement will be sought :

(a) With the allied governments, permitting the importation of non-contraband raw material into Belgium, and the exportation of non-contraband goods made therefrom or from local Belgian raw materials ;

(b) With the German authorities, by which they would undertake not to requisition or in any manner consume the raw materials, or the products made therefrom, and to facilitate the importation and exportation of such material.

2. The Neutral Commission for Relief in Belgium would establish a sufficient staff of inspectors, both in and out of Belgium, to see that these guarantees are faithfully complied with and to provide the necessary machinery.

3. It is proposed to organise each manufacturing industry into a syndicate. This syndicate should send its own representatives abroad, who would arrange for the purchase and importation of raw material and for the exportation and sale of the manufactured goods of the syndicate involved.

4. The difference between the cost of raw material and the sum realised from the sale of manufactured goods should be handed to this Commission and deposited by it in English banks to the credit of certain Belgian banks until after peace is declared.

5. The Belgian banks in Belgium would undertake to loan to the syndicates in Belgium local paper currency against the security of the deposits in London, to a sufficient extent to enable them to pay for their labour and the purchase of local raw material.'

In the plan outlined in this memorandum Hoover believed that a great proportion of the industry of Belgium could be revived without benefiting directly the Germans or without creating any monetary increment in Belgium which would be within reach of the Germans. In his memorandum on the relief situation in Belgium which accompanied his proposals for the industrial section, Hoover pointed out also that the greater part of the problem of caring for the destitute could be overcome if this industrial scheme should be put into effect.\*

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\* Hoover to Lord Eustace Percy, August 24, 1915.

**Hoover's reasons for taking up the Industrial Plan.**—In a letter to Whitlock, written the following day, Hoover enclosed a copy of his communication to Lord Eustace Percy and explained the reasons which had led him to make the proposal therein contained. 'You will notice that it provides for taking a tremendous further load on our backs, and incidentally would plunge you into further negotiations. I do not myself see any solution of the Belgian position short of these measures, and, as loath as we have been to undertake it, it seems absolutely necessary. . . . In this matter I may say that much the same scheme was put up by the Dutch and I supported it strongly here, but it was turned down and the attitude of the Government here is that they might trust us with it, although they are not disposed to trust the Dutch. We, however, shall have a delicate situation with the Dutch Government, which I propose to overcome by co-operating with them in some manner.'

**The British Foreign Office approves the Proposal.**—The British Foreign Office agreed in principle to the proposals made by Hoover, and he therefore requested Lord Eustace Percy, on September 7, that the undertakings to be sought from the Germans should be immediately formulated, as he was desirous of going into Belgium and take up the matter.

**Stipulations of the British Foreign Office.**—On September 11 the Foreign Office notified the Belgian Minister in London that the British Government were prepared to grant greater facilities for Belgian trade if a scheme could be devised presenting adequate guarantees. It would be an essential condition, however, that such a strict control should be exercised that neither the raw material nor the finished products might get into the hands of the Germans. The Foreign Office took the standpoint that the Commission for Relief in Belgium should be entrusted with the supervision of the matter. Three fixed principles were stipulated in the letter as a basis for the work to be undertaken, viz. : (1) that Belgian industries should be enabled, so far as possible, to employ those sections of the industrial population which otherwise would fall and are now falling on the charity dispensed by the Comité National ; and (2) that Belgian industry should be enabled, as far as possible, to pay in exports for the foodstuffs imported by the Relief Commission, thus relieving the Belgian Government and the allied governments of the financial burden involved by their present contributions to the Commission ; (3) that facilities for Belgian exports should not afford an opportunity for the supply by Germany of raw materials or half-manufactured materials to Belgian industries, thus in effect opening a market for German exports.'

The Foreign Office proposed that the Belgian Minister should draw up a detailed plan in consultation with Mr. Hoover for submission to the British and French Governments.

**The proposed Organisation for the Industrial Section.**—In a letter to the Belgian Minister of September 28, 1915, Mr. Hoover outlined a plan of organisation for the industrial section. This plan provided for a Comité Industriel to be organised in Brussels, comprising representatives of various industries. It should be under the patronage of the diplomatic patrons of the Commission for Relief in Belgium. In addition to the Belgian members there should also be Dutch members and representatives of the Commission for Relief in Belgium. The Comité would organise agencies in Rotterdam and elsewhere to conduct the commercial phases of its business. It was provided that in the industries to be assisted only those factories would be included which could employ the maximum amount of labour, which would use raw materials of overseas or undoubted Belgian origin, and whose entire output should be exported. The Germans should guarantee that each factory should be free from requisition or purchase of its raw materials, manufactured goods, by-products,

plant or equipment. Its entire personnel should be free from interference or influence by the German authorities. The factory was to be placed under the protection of the Commission in the same manner as the food warehouses, and the whole of the imports and exports should be transported by the Commission for Relief in Belgium under its flag and protection. The profits obtained abroad by the agents of the Comité Industriel from the sale of products should be deposited to the credit of the Commission. A certificate of deposit would be issued by the Commission in favour of the Comité Industriel, but this was to be payable only after the declaration of peace. These certificates could be used in Belgium as a basis for local loans for payment of wages.

**Guarantees demanded from the Germans.**—The Foreign Office, after a thorough consideration of the whole matter, drew up the conditions under which they would permit the industrial section to work and the guarantees which should be required from the Germans.

(1) The Germans were to give up all requisitions of stocks of manufactured articles in Belgium. The Belgian manufacturers should be permitted to export their stocks via Rotterdam and to deposit the money received from the sale of such goods in British banks.

(2) As soon as a list was drawn up in Belgium of the imports necessary to the various industries, the Germans should raise all embargoes on the free circulation of the articles concerned within Belgium, and the control of these articles was to be turned over to the bodies to be set up representing the various industries.

(3) The Germans were to guarantee that no articles actually imported or no articles of the same kind existing in Belgium, as well as the products of the industries receiving such imports or native products, should be seized, requisitioned, bought or used by the German authorities in any way directly or indirectly.

(4) The export of all articles of the sort provided for in the preceding section should be prohibited except to the agency at Rotterdam. The export to that destination should be left entirely free.

(5) The Belgian firms receiving raw material should not accept any material from Germany or Austria-Hungary and the German authorities should guarantee to raise no objection to this condition. In order to obviate any possibility of use of German raw material, it would be desirable that the importation into Belgium from Germany of such raw materials as should be named should be absolutely prohibited by the German authorities.

(6) The bodies set up to represent the various industries and the whole organisation constituted by them should have complete freedom of action. The Germans were to impose no restrictions whatever as to the conduct of the business.

(7) All articles mentioned in paragraphs 2 and 3 which had been requisitioned by the Germans, but not yet consumed or exported from Belgium, should be released. All articles requisitioned which had been consumed or exported should be paid for in full within one month from the time when the first payment is made by the Comité Industriel in Belgium to the firm concerned for wages.

(8) There should be a moratorium for all debts owed or payments due by any Belgian firm, benefited under the present scheme, to persons in Germany or Austria. These demands of the British Government were transmitted to the patron Ministers of the Commission in Belgium to be taken up with the German authorities.

**The attitude of the Germans toward the plan.**—Mr. Hoover made a trip to Brussels

in the first week of October, and while there participated in a number of conferences with the Germans with regard to the comité industriel. The Germans, while agreeing in principle to the scheme proposed, raised considerable objections to the Commission for Relief in Belgium having anything to do with it. Their objections seemed to Mr. Hoover to be based on three chief grounds: (1) objection to control by an outside or neutral body; (2) a natural antipathy to the Commission because of its energetic activities; (3) a desire to see an independent door open by which imports could be made into Belgium.

As Hoover pointed out, in a letter of October 13 to the Belgian Minister in London, the German authorities had for some time had in mind the notion that as the Belgian relief work was well organised and proceeding smoothly, there was no longer any need for the intervention of a neutral body, and that therefore the Comité National itself should take over the functions of the Commission for Relief in Belgium. For this reason they insisted strongly that if a new enterprise for industrial revival was undertaken, it should be done by a Belgian Comité Industriel without any exterior control of the sort proposed.

This was quite impossible in view of the attitude of the allied governments who made it a condition to the continuation of imports to Belgium that the Commission should continue its functions. The Allies also strongly objected to the creation of another means by which supplies could pass in and out of Belgium, and insisted that all the importation and exportation concerned should be handled by the Commission.

Delays in the Negotiations.—Mr. Hoover appreciated, however, the difficulty and even the danger involved for the Commission in sending sufficient Americans into Belgium to carry on the work of inspecting the industrial operations. He therefore suggested that this work of necessary inspection might well be turned over to Dutch representatives nominated by the Dutch Government.

Mr. Hoover would have preferred that the Dutch should have taken over the whole problem of industrial rehabilitation, but in view of the attitude of the allied governments he realised that the Commission provided the only means for securing the success of the industrial project.

The matter remained in *status quo* until nearly the end of November, as it proved impossible, in view of the new difficulties that had arisen between the Commission and the Germans in Belgium, to negotiate the new agreements necessary. At the end of November Sir Edward Grey, writing to the American Ambassador in London, requested that if possible some action should be taken on the scheme.

The passage of time was resulting in the closing of a large proportion of even those few Belgian industries still in operation. Sir Edward Grey pointed out that the responsibility for this would not rest on the British Government, since he had expressed his readiness to consider favourably proposals for the revival of those industries in which adequate guarantees could be provided that the relief thus effected would benefit the Belgian population and not the Germans.

Preliminary steps in the Organisation of the Industrial Section.—Mr. Hoover, while in Brussels at the end of November, took the opportunity to have several long conferences over the industrial proposals with the German authorities. A set of guarantees was drawn up, covering the more important points insisted upon by the British Government. Articles of incorporation were also drawn up for the Comité Industriel and detailed plans for the operation of that Comité were carefully devised. Thus the

organisation was practically made ready to function ; it only needed the definite approval of the two governments to make it possible to begin the work.

The Germans attempt to Eliminate the C.R.B. from the Industrial Plan.—The Germans continued, however, to object to the participation of the Commission in the industrial scheme, and proposed that another committee be set up, possibly working in co-operation with the Commission, to do the work of transportation and distribution outside Belgium. Hoover pointed out, however, that such a scheme would have very great disadvantages, as it would lead to competition between the Commission and the Comité Industriel in the matter of transport facilities, and would make almost impossible any real control of the work of the comité industriel.

In order to attempt to eliminate the Commission from the proposed scheme, the Germans began negotiations with the Dutch and Spanish Ministers in Brussels to try to provide for the organisation of such a neutral body as would eliminate the participation of the Commission or of any American representatives in the industrial scheme. The civil administration of the German Government had since the month of June been endeavouring to get the Belgian manufacturers to agree to open up their industries as an adjunct to the German production. The Belgians were to be provided with raw materials and were to turn over their products to the Germans. After the Belgians had emphatically refused to take up any such scheme, the Germans again showed an interest in the proposal of Mr. Hoover, but as the carrying through of the proposal in the form outlined by Mr. Hoover would have prevented the Germans from gaining any immediate advantage from the revival of Belgian industry, their enthusiasm in the matter rapidly cooled. They tried to secure the elimination of the Commission from the proposed scheme, as in this way they hoped that they would be able to profit indirectly through the lack of a proper control by the proposed substitute neutral body. The French and the British Governments alike had considerable objections, however, to any such schemes, and refused absolutely to permit any new imports to be made into Belgium except under the same conditions as applied to food. The matter therefore came to an impasse.

The Germans fail to give an Answer to the Proposals.—The Germans failed to make an answer to the proposals made by Mr. Hoover. After waiting for a considerable time, the British Foreign Office published a letter to the Belgian Minister containing the offer of the British Government to permit the shipment of raw materials into Belgium and the export of finished products under the control of the Commission for Relief in Belgium. The Foreign Office stated that the scheme must be considered as having failed because of the lack of a reply from the Germans. The German Government in turn issued an official statement through the press bureau to the effect that the German Government had been unable to agree with the proposal made by the British Government because of the condition that the value of all exports from Belgium should be deposited in a bank in the United Kingdom. The Germans, in later negotiations with the Belgian manufacturers, demanded that the value of everything they exported should be paid into a bank in Belgium. The British Government, of course, would not agree to this.

Negotiations in 1916.—In a letter of April 1, 1916, to the American Ambassador, Lord Robert Cecil, on behalf of the Foreign Office, said that there were but two alternatives before the British Government, either to prohibit entirely all exports from and imports to Belgium or to provide that the value of these exports should be paid to the Relief Commission and used by them for the purchase of foodstuffs abroad. The American

Ambassador was requested to transmit this offer to the German authorities in Belgium with the statement that if they did not accept it, His Majesty's Government would have no choice but to still further restrict the Belgian trade.

Mr. Hoover during repeated visits to Brussels brought up the matter time after time with the German authorities there, but was never able to secure an agreement from them. They would neither definitely accept nor definitely decline the proposals made by the British Government through the Commission. The question of providing for the revival of Belgian industries was therefore never acted upon and the scheme was finally abandoned by its proposers because of the inability to secure any agreement.

**The Failure of the Plan for Industrial Revival.**—From time to time the matter came up again in official correspondence throughout the year 1916, but after the spring of 1916 there was no longer any possibility of the scheme being carried through.

Thus one of the most ambitious proposals ever made by the Commission came to naught because of the refusal of the German Government to give guarantees which would make it impossible for them to profit from Belgian industry. The Germans have no disinterested affection for Belgium. They were willing to permit food to go in and to make such concessions as could be wrung from them by the Commission, because a starving population in Belgium would have given them infinite difficulty of a military sort in keeping the country quiet. But, once the population was being fed, the Germans had no interest in seeing the Belgian industries revived, if these industries were not to be of any advantage to Germany. Therefore, instead of making the agreements which would have made possible the revival of industry in Belgium and the employment in these industries of thousands of Belgian workmen, living in enforced idleness, they began in 1916 to plan and to carry into effect the scheme they had long had in mind of forcing the Belgian unemployed to work in Germany or for the German interests in Belgium. This scheme came to its natural fruition in the middle of the summer 1916 when the deportations of Belgian workmen were begun.

#### FURTHER DIFFICULTIES WITH THE GERMANS—ESPIONAGE CHARGES

**The rivalry between German Departments for Control of the Relief.**—Toward the end of the year 1915 the Commission encountered new and serious difficulties with the German authorities in Belgium. The Commission's position was particularly unhappy because it was made for a time the bone of contention between two German departments. The supervision of all matters relating to the relief work had been entrusted chiefly to Dr. von Sandt and the civil administration of the German Government. The diplomatic negotiations passed, however, through the hands of the political department of the General Government, headed by Baron von der Lancken. There had been for some time growing jealousy between these two departments as to which should have the privilege of controlling the activities of the Commission and the Comité National. This rivalry reached its climax in the summer of 1915 as a result of incidents which occurred at that time.

**The Failure of the Civil Administration to secure Control of the Relief.**—The failure of the civil administration to secure any control over the relief operations, as a result of the attempt to reorganise the Comité National in June, caused it to lose favour in the eyes of the General Government. The only result of the long negotiations undertaken by the civil



administration had been that the Governor-General was obliged, in order to ensure the continuance of food importations, to give new and vexing assurances to meet the demands of the British Government. Consequently the Governor-General had placed practically the whole control of relief operations in the hands of Baron von der Lancken and the political department.

**The relation between Relief and Unemployment.**—The General Government had not given up the hope of making the relief work serve directly or indirectly the German military interests. The whole question of the distribution of charitable funds which seemed to have been settled in July came up again in October. The Germans again threatened to make an absolute separation between the alimentation and the secours departments of the Comité National and to put the secours department under German control. Many of the higher officials of the General Government were still very suspicious of the activities of the secours department, as they believed that this was deliberately using its funds to give such relief to Belgian workmen as would make it unnecessary for them to accept work from the Germans. The Germans were beginning to feel a shortage of man power and were beginning to comb out vigorously their own working classes to secure recruits for the army. It was only natural therefore that the commanders of the German army should turn to the occupied territories in the effort to find there a labour supply to replace the German workmen who were being mobilised; but as long as the Comité National was providing sufficient food and clothing for the Belgian working population, there was little likelihood that the Belgians would willingly work for the Germans. The Germans in Belgium had the idea, however, that if they could get control of the distribution of the charitable funds, they could compel the Belgian workmen to accept employment in industries directly or indirectly contributing to provide military necessities. The General Government had in July given its solemn assurance that the relief work would never be used to compel Belgians to work for the Germans, but it was readily apparent that this promise would be no longer respected if Germans ever had the opportunity of realising their project of assuming control of the charitable side of the work of the Comité National.

**The Efforts of the Political Department.**—In the fall of 1915 therefore the Baron von der Lancken and his department had already the upper hand over the civil administration in their rivalry over the control of the relief organisations and were attempting to accomplish the ends which the civil administration had vainly pursued. It was at this point that the relations between the German authorities and the Commission were seriously embarrassed by several incidents such as the charge of espionage made against several of the members of the Commission.

**The Espionage Charges.**—On November 8, 1915, Baron von der Lancken sent for Hugh Gibson, secretary of the American Legation, and informed him that serious complaints had been made against three members of the Commission; that the German authorities were not requiring that the men should leave Belgium immediately, but would be much gratified if the Commission could find a field for their activity elsewhere. Gibson, naturally much surprised at this statement, since two\* of the men were considered to be among the most capable of the Commission's staff, enquired what was the nature of the complaints against these men. Von der Lancken replied that he could give no further information in the matter as the details were not in his possession. He added his regret that in the case of one of the men, who was about to be attached to the American

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\* Lewis Richards and J. C. Green.

Legation with the permission of the State Department, the German authorities could not consent to deal with him as a member of the staff of a neutral Legation.\* Gibson, still more surprised, stated that he was confident that the behaviour of the men in question had been quite correct and that the matter seemed to be of sufficient importance to lay before Mr. Hoover, who would be coming to Belgium in a few weeks.

**The Commission's Attitude toward the German Authorities.**—The Commission, said Gibson, would deal in a generous spirit with any complaint brought to its attention by the German authorities, but it was most unlikely that the Commission would ask members of its staff to leave Belgium under a cloud unless first informed by the German authorities of the precise character of the charges against them. He regretted the lack of frankness which he thought the Commission had a right to expect from the German authorities, and emphasised the fact that the entire work of the Commission rested upon a foundation not more substantial than the confidence which the various belligerent governments had in it. The Commission, he said, had for over a year carried on its work in Belgium with the endeavour to most scrupulously fulfil its obligation of neutrality, and there had not yet been a single instance of an improper act by any member of the Commission nor had there been any complaint previously filed by the German authorities. If the Germans could lay before the Commission the evidence of improper behaviour by any of its staff, he and Mr. Hoover would be the first to insist that the man should leave the country and the service of the Commission, but they could not take such action unless the German authorities were willing to deal equally frankly with them. Baron von der Lancken refused, however, to give any further information on the subject and Gibson therefore decided to postpone any action until Hoover's arrival.

**A Business Letter and a Tempest in a Teapot.**—The friction between the Germans and the Commission was further increased before Mr. Hoover arrived by a rather absurd charge that the director of the Commission had addressed discourteous letters to certain functionaries of the political department, who took their diplomatic dignity rather seriously, and insisted that any Americans addressing them should do so with all the punctiliousness usual in formal diplomatic negotiations. The Commission was endeavouring at this time to get its lighters freed from restrictive regulations imposed by the Germans, and, at the request of von Bissing, Poland had prepared a memorandum on the way the passports, harbour permits, etc., should be issued to the C.R.B. lighters; the Germans had, however, delayed their reply and serious difficulties had been encountered by the Commission in securing the necessary documents prescribed by the German regulations.

**Official Delays call forth the offending Letter.**—Poland wrote to Dr. Reith of the political department of the General Government, on November 5, asking that a practical method of procedure be settled at once. The matter was very vital to the Commission, since it occasioned much delay and annoyance. The Germans had made no reply to this letter. On November 17 Poland wrote again to Dr. Reith, referring to his previous letter and to the fact that no reply had been received, 'this despite my letter to you of the 11th inst. and our personal interview.' He went on to explain the necessity of having the matter settled at once and said: 'We can only explain our failure to hear from you to administrative or office delays, and we wish to impress upon you again that you are occasioning a very serious situation by allowing twelve days to pass without an answer adjusting details

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\* J. C. Green was to have been attached to the Legation.

which we should be able to settle in twenty minutes. I beg you to believe that the vigorous form of this letter is occasioned merely by the gravity of the situation and not by any lack of distinguished consideration of yourself or belief in your lack of attention to the many requests that have been made in the past.'

Mr. Poland was shortly after summoned by a clerk of von der Lancken's staff and told in an arrogant manner that the General Government would not receive any communications such as he had addressed to them. The clerk then endeavoured to thrust into Poland's hand the letter, of which certain passages have just been quoted. Mr. Poland refused to accept it and went away.

**Hoover learns of the New Activities of the Germans.**—Mr. Hoover arrived in Brussels on November 28 to find a rather formidable tempest brewing. Hugh Gibson of the Legation informed him that he had received an unofficial request from von der Lancken that Hoover should remove from Belgium the three men whom von der Lancken had mentioned to him. Von der Lancken had given no reason to Gibson for this request and had merely declared that the Germans did not want them to remain longer in Belgium. Hoover learned from his staff in Belgium of the new threats of the Germans to separate the secours department and bring it under their control in order to be able to hold up relief to all who would not work for the German army. He learned also of the numerous minor violations of the guarantees that had occurred throughout the country during the previous month or two. These, while petty in themselves, brought into question larger issues which made the situation intolerable for the Commission, unless, in Hoover's words, 'we were prepared to abandon all sense of honour to our obligations and give up our position as a screen against injustice to the Belgian population, in so far as our work could lend itself to serving as a means of protection from tyranny.'

**An Ultimatum to the General Government and an Appeal to Headquarters.**—After thoroughly discussing the matter with the Commission staff and the members of the Comité National, Hoover decided that the situation must be completely cleared up. He therefore asked Hugh Gibson to see Baron von der Lancken, and to inform him that, as the Commission was considering withdrawal from Belgium and the abandonment of its work, he did not consider the incident of the three men worth discussing. Hoover also made use of the new source of pressure on the Germans in Brussels which had become available as a result of the extension of the activities of the Commission to Northern France. In Northern France the relations between the Commission and the representatives of the general staff were much closer and more friendly than was the case in the relations of the Commission in Belgium to the General Government. The German general headquarters were very pleased and satisfied with the Commission's work, and were even proposing that the Commission should extend its activities and enlarge its scope in such a way as to include Poland and, perhaps, Serbia in its field of operations. Hoover therefore asked Mr. Caspar Whitney, at that time chief representative of the Commission in Northern France, to go to the general staff at Charleville and lay the situation before them; to explain that, although the relations between the Germans and the Commission in Northern France had been cordial and helpful, the Commission was in such a situation in Belgium that it would probably have to withdraw; and to inform the general staff that it should be prepared to take any necessary steps for the feeding of the French population, as there were less than three weeks' store of supplies in the warehouses. Whitney was also to inform the staff that Hoover and his associates were deeply interested in the invitation urged by the general

staff that they should extend their operations to Poland, but that as the whole foundation of the work in Belgium was crumbling it would be quite impossible to even consider any further extension of the work.

Hugh Gibson discusses the situation with von der Lancken.—On November 30 Hugh Gibson was requested by von der Lancken to call upon him. Von der Lancken stated that in addition to the three men against whom objections had already been made, he desired to add to the list one more name, that of Mr. Poland. He objected to him, he said, because he had written offensive letters to the political department, and thereupon showed to Gibson the copy of a letter the offending passages of which have been quoted above. Gibson, after reading the letter, said diplomatically that the charge was quite absurd, that it had long been the custom of the Commission to deal directly in a business manner with the political department in detailed matters and that the letter in question was a quite proper business letter though not couched in diplomatic language. Any impatience shown in it, said Gibson, was quite comprehensible in view of the interference which the Commission had suffered in the question of lighters and tugs.

Gibson points out the Real Issue.—Von der Lancken then went on to take up the general question of removing the four men, but Gibson interrupted him with the statement that it was quite useless to consider the question at that time, as it was only a minor incident in a matter of grave importance. Gibson pointed out that the conditions under which the Belgians were being fed had been growing fatally worse for some months; that the members of the Commission had been subjected to all sorts of affronts and outrages; that the entire work had been threatened in many directions; and that the German authorities, far from showing that sympathetic co-operation and adherence to the spirit of the guarantees to which the Commission was entitled, seemed to be placing endless difficulties in its way. Gibson added that Hoover, while in America,\* had informed the officials of the American Government of the character of the difficulties under which the Commission was working, and said it had been agreed that at any time he and his colleagues felt that their dignity and self-respect as Americans could no longer tolerate the treatment accorded them they would be supported by the American Government in withdrawing from the work. Hoover on his return to England, said Gibson, had laid the situation before the British Government and endeavoured to arrange to have the work taken over by other neutrals in case the Americans felt they could no longer tolerate the situation in Belgium, but the British Government had emphatically declined to even consider the idea, and had intimated that if the Germans compelled the Commission to withdraw the British Government would stop the work at once, and would justify their action by saying that under such conditions no neutral body could hope to succeed. Thus the German Government would be placed in a most unfavourable light before the world. Gibson added further that the time had come when the Commission could no longer ask any American gentleman engaged in the work to submit to the sort of treatment they had had in the past, that Mr. Hoover and his colleagues were now seriously considering withdrawing from the work, and that the American people would not stand for a moment that men engaged in a work, which in effect represented the American people, should lower the dignity of their country by the acceptance of such treatment at the hands of the Germans.

Von der Lancken's declaration of the German Attitude.—Von der Lancken burst

\* In October 1915.

out cynically and impatiently that it was quite all right so far as Germany was concerned; she had plenty of food now coming from the Balkans and the Belgians would not starve. They would be given a ration of black bread, and if they did not like it and caused any riots they would quite simply be shot down. Gibson immediately replied that he was very glad to be informed that the Commission's work was no longer needed, as it was being continued only under the impression that its work was indispensable. Von der Lancken, however, immediately regretted his outburst of temper and tried to soften his remarks by complimenting the Commission on the admirable way in which it had discharged its task.

**Gibson explains the Commission's Position.**—Gibson pointed out that the Commission did not wish to be compelled to withdraw and would be happy to remain if a satisfactory solution could be found by which the representatives of the Commission could be treated as gentlemen and could receive proper facilities for carrying on their work. The chief difficulty, according to Gibson, seemed to have been that no competent official had been designated by the German Government to aid the Commission in its work, although the importance of the work was such that the President and Secretary of State of the United States had given their personal attention to its problems. The King of Spain had shown a deep personal interest in it and Mr. Hoover had had no difficulty in securing the undivided attention of the British Prime Minister and his colleagues of the Cabinet whenever the work of the Commission made this necessary. Gibson therefore intimated that some official with real authority should be delegated by the General Government to act with the Commission. At the conclusion of this interview the Baron von der Lancken had apparently begun to realise the seriousness of the situation and said he would like to talk it over again at the first opportunity. He thanked Gibson for his frankness in explaining the difficulties and took leave of him in an unusual friendly manner.

**The Spanish Minister supports the Commission.**—After leaving von der Lancken, Gibson called on the Marquis de Villalobar, the Spanish Minister, and gave him an account of the conversation. The Spanish Minister heartily approved everything that Gibson had said, and stated that the Commission could count upon him for full support in any steps it might be found necessary to take. He declared that it was quite inadmissible, not only from the point of view of the Commission, but also from that of the diplomatic patrons, that the representatives of the Commission should be dismissed arbitrarily from Belgium without an explanation or without the assignment of any reasons by the German Government. He said he would see von der Lancken himself and would arrange to have a joint letter written by the diplomatic patrons declining to even consider the removal of any of the men engaged upon the work of the Commission without definite proof of improper conduct.

On the same day, November 30, Hoover received word from Major von Kessler of the general staff that he would come up to Brussels personally to intervene in the matter on December 2. Before his arrival, however, von der Lancken had requested that Hoover should call upon him, and on the afternoon of December 1, Hoover and Gibson held a conference with him to consider the situation which had arisen.

**Hoover's Statement of the Situation in Belgium.**—Hoover opened the conference by explaining how terribly disheartened he and his colleagues had become as a result of the general attitude of the German authorities in Belgium toward the Commission. In Northern France, he said, the Commission had met with much more sympathetic and helpful co-operation. Gibson interrupted to state that, although the American Legation

stood in the same relation to the Commission in Northern France as it did in Belgium, it had not yet on a single occasion had to intervene in France, as all questions had been immediately and satisfactorily settled between the general staff and the Commission. whereas in Belgium the Legation had constantly to intervene to protect the Commission from interference from the many petty officials.

**The Charges against the Commission's Representatives.**—Hoover then brought up the question of the men whom von der Lancken wanted to send out of Belgium. Von der Lancken declared that he felt quite justified in his demand; that he believed that he was only standing on a promise made to him by Mr. Hoover at the beginning of the year that the Commission would remove any of its members from Belgium at any time who should happen to become *persona non grata* to the German authorities. He claimed further that it was not necessary to state the reasons which had made the Germans demand the removal of certain members. Hoover insisted that this was not a fair interpretation of his own statement, and that his assurance had been that he would remove members of the Commission only in case that in so doing no injustice was done to them. Hoover admitted that von der Lancken had the arbitrary power to do anything he pleased, but said that if he wanted the Commission to continue he must act justly.

Hoover tried to remove the discussion to matters of broader significance. He emphasised the fact that the lives of ten million people depended on the continuance of the Commission's work; that the Commission's representatives were Americans of the best type, and that they were truly representative of the American people and even in a sense of the American Government. The Commission therefore would not tolerate any treatment of its representatives incompatible with their dignity and self-respect as representative Americans. Hoover added that the Commission would do everything in its power to live up to its obligations; that its whole usefulness depended upon its scrupulous honesty, in the observance of neutrality and upon the confidence of the various governments. Even the very idea of espionage was simply abhorrent in view of the nature of the work and he would be the last man to shelter anyone guilty of assisting any of the belligerents in an improper manner. So far as strict neutrality was concerned, the Commission was more Catholic than the Pope. He therefore asked von der Lancken to state frankly the reasons for objecting to the delegates in question and said that he would examine the matter exhaustively and would remove the men if he found that there was even sufficient ground for the charges to submit the men to further suspicion.

**The basis of the Espionage Charge.**—Von der Lancken procrastinated and appeared obviously unwilling to state his real reasons for demanding the removal of the men. After much questioning, however, he finally stated that if Mr. Hoover would investigate the Commission's Rotterdam office, he would be able to find proof against the men in question; that there was a system of some sort by which the men named were transmitting to Holland information harmful to Germany's military interests. He would not, however, make any more detailed statement. He added that the information sent out of Belgium in this manner was apparently made use of by the director of the Rotterdam office and the representative of the Comité National in that office, and that he had positive proof that English spies had asked the Rotterdam director to be sent into Belgium to carry on their work under the cover of the Commission; that the Rotterdam director had accepted the idea and would have sent the men in had not another American in the office protested violently. Both Gibson and Hoover attempted to get further details as to the matter, but the baron

would communicate nothing further. He had absolute confidence, however, he said, in Mr. Hoover's honest desire to deal fairly with the German authorities and would therefore leave the matter in Mr. Hoover's hands, with the understanding that he would transmit further information when he deemed it advisable.

The case of Poland's Letter disposed of.—In discussing the case of Mr. Poland's letter to Dr. Reith, von der Lancken demanded that Poland should apologise for the letter, which he considered an insult to the German administration, or leave Belgium. Hoover and Gibson both pointed out that, while the letter was not framed in the language of diplomatic intercourse, it could not be considered offensive as a business letter; that Mr. Poland had not the slightest intention of injuring the tender susceptibilities of the political department and that he had become so entirely disgusted with the shameful treatment he had received since he had come to Belgium that he was in a mood to resign and leave the country. Hoover called attention to the fact that Mr. Poland was a very able man, the chief engineer of a large railway system who had come to Belgium as a volunteer to aid in the great humanitarian work and, while paying his own expenses, was working day and night; that he was handling the transportation of 5,000 tons of food daily across Belgium practically without calling upon the railways for a single car; that as a result the work was going on so smoothly that the baron himself had not the slightest comprehension of what was going on; consequently it would be a most deplorable thing if a petty objection at the tone of a personal business letter should force him to leave the country. Hoover stated quite frankly to the baron that, while he did not suppose that the baron himself was trying to break down the work, yet his attitude and the attitude of the German officials in Belgium were doing that very thing. If this attitude was maintained it would be impossible for the Commission to secure the right kind of men to carry on the work and consequently the whole business might collapse at any moment. He insisted therefore that the German authorities should take a broader point of view and should accord the representatives of the Commission the same generous treatment that they were prepared to give the German authorities. Hoover therefore insisted that the question of Mr. Poland should be settled once and for all, and asked the Baron von der Lancken to consider the matter closed, giving his personal assurance that Mr. Poland had intended no offence whatever and stated that no more letters of the same sort would be written. The Baron von der Lancken, after some hesitation, grudgingly agreed to this.

Before the close of the conference the Baron von der Lancken turned to Hoover and asked him why he had telegraphed to Major von Kessler of the general staff to come to Brussels. Hoover replied that it was partly to discuss the proposal for the provisioning of Poland, but principally to warn the general staff that the Commission feared that it was about to be compelled to withdraw from Belgium because of the attitude of the local officials. The Commission, said Hoover, would absolutely refuse to entertain the work in Poland until its position was made more tolerable in the west. He said that he believed that Major von Kessler would be able to bring about a satisfactory agreement as to the work in Belgium, after a conference with the Governor-General.

In spite of all the efforts of Hoover and Gibson to impress upon von der Lancken the broader questions involved, he persisted in returning to petty questions of relatively minor importance. He said in a lukewarm way that he admired many things about the work which the Commission had done in Belgium, but added that the Commission was not at all necessary to the German authorities and the Belgians would not starve in the event of its withdrawal.

**The Conference with Representatives of the General Staff.**—The following day Major von Kessler, Count Wengersky and Captain Uhl of the German general staff called on Hoover and Poland, and a three-hour conference followed over the questions at issue. Hoover made a frank and complete statement of the whole situation. He said that the attitude of the staff had been so open and frank that he could be perfectly plainspoken, even to the point of brutality; that the situation in Belgium was becoming intolerable and the provisionment of Northern France would collapse with the work in Belgium. Hoover described the difficulties which had arisen with the German Government in Belgium, explained how the Commission had first dealt with the civil administration and that had been taken over by the political department from the civil administration, as the result of the failure of the civil administration to bring the work under its complete control. Hoover pointed out also that most of the difficulties of the Commission came about as a result of the feud between von Sandt and von der Lancken. Von der Lancken had made up all sorts of tales about the work of the Commission in order to justify the representations he had made to the General Government at the time the supervision of the relief work had been transferred from the civil administration to his own department. Since that time, said Hoover, the Commission had been subjected to an intolerable and destructive inquisition. It had received no help whatever from the administration in Brussels, which was even beginning to connive at the violation of the spirit of the agreements. Hoover said also that the attempts to manipulate the relief work had as their object the compulsion of the population to accept work from the Germans and that this was a thing the Commission would not stand for, as it was in absolute violation of the German agreements and of international law.

**The Espionage Charge.**—The question of the espionage charges against the three representatives was brought up. Von Kessler said that he had heard something of the matter and that the rumours which were spread about had greatly disturbed the general staff, although he had the utmost confidence in Hoover, Kellogg, Whitney and most of the other men. Hoover agreed that, if there was any question of espionage by members of the Commission, the matter transcended every question of food-supply, and said he would investigate the matter to the very bottom. He expressed his absolute disbelief that there was a word of truth in it and said he thought it was a story produced by von der Lancken to gain credit for himself at the expense of the Commission. Von Kessler said that the charge had been made that the three representatives of the Commission concerned had been responsible for the French offensive of September 1915. The story seems to have been based on the fact that one of these representatives was at the time stationed behind the Artois front where the French action took place. He was supposed to have transmitted information by means of other men to Holland, but Mr. Hoover pointed out that this charge was absolute nonsense, as two of the men accused had not arrived from America until after the date of the offensive. Von Kessler agreed that further data should be provided in the matter and the Commission could depend upon the most sympathetic attitude from the general staff.

**The Intervention of the General Staff.**—On the main issues involved, von Kessler stated that he and his superiors on the general staff had taken up the matter energetically with General von Bissing and had recommended to him the creation of a special department of his government to work with the Commission and the Comité National. He said the Governor-General had agreed to this and that the new office would be immediately established under the charge of two officers who were familiar with American conditions and



who enjoyed the confidence of the Commission. Von Kessler said that this bureau would be organised in a manner satisfactory to the Commission. Hoover insisted that the Commission for Relief in Belgium and the Comité National must be allowed to continue their work intact and that their departments must not be divided. Von Kessler assured him that the wishes of the Commission in this regard would be respected.

**The Formation of the Vermittlungsstelle.**—Von Kessler lost no time in taking up with the high authorities in Brussels the difficulties with the Commission and, because of his own personality and ability and because of the prestige he enjoyed, was able very soon to bring the General Government into line and to induce them to believe that a more tolerant and friendly attitude should be assumed toward the Commission. On the day after the conference Mr. Poland was invited by von der Lancken to call upon him. The baron met him informally and pleasantly in an ante-room and conducted him to his private office. He courteously explained that a new office, to be known as the 'Vermittlungsstelle' was to be created, under the supervision of his department, to have charge of matters relating to banking arrangements, the crop commissions, industrial affairs and the work of the Comité National and the Commission for Relief in Belgium; that this office would take up and promptly act on all routine matters submitted to it by the Commission; and that it would intervene with the other government departments, whenever necessary, to obviate any friction or misunderstanding and to aid the Commission in its work. Mr. Poland said that he had met the officers who would be in charge of the Vermittlungsstelle and that their selection would be most agreeable to the Commission. After further discussion of the co-operation to be established with the German authorities the conversation drew to an amicable close, the baron having throughout shown the most courteous deference to Mr. Poland.

**Hoover investigates the Espionage Charge.**—Von der Lancken received Mr. Hoover in the same spirit on December 4, and gave him further details about the work of the new offices to be established to deal with the Commission. He said that the only question remaining unsettled was that of the espionage charges against the three representatives of the Commission. He gave Mr. Hoover the name of a man in the Rotterdam office, who, he said, could put him in possession of the entire facts. Hoover agreed at once to go to Rotterdam to look into the matter. Accordingly, on December 6, Hoover went by motor to Holland and on arriving in Rotterdam immediately sought out the man whom von der Lancken had referred to. This latter denied having given any information of the kind described and said there was not the slightest shred of truth in the statement that he had anything to do with the matter. Hoover had him examined by the American Minister under oath, and took a deposition which he swore to on December 7. A similar deposition was also obtained from the director of the Rotterdam office. Hoover then returned to Brussels and asked Gibson to forward the depositions to von der Lancken.

**Von der Lancken withdraws the Charges.**—On December 8 Hoover called upon von der Lancken, who stated that he had read the depositions and was quite dumbfounded. Hoover stated that he had made careful enquiries about all the Commission's representatives in Belgium and had satisfied himself that no charges could be made against any of them. Von der Lancken then agreed that, in view of the evidence which Hoover had produced, he would be compelled to consider the matter as closed, and that he would take to task the people who had made the false representations to him. Hoover said that when men were brought into Belgium, the Commission satisfied itself that they were men who would

observe scrupulously the obligation of neutrality, but that it was found that after a time some of the men became violently pro-German or pro-Ally as the result of their experiences in Belgium and that he had made up his mind to remove from Belgium within the next thirty days all those men of whose neutrality there could be any question. He said that as soon as he could find men to replace them, these changes would be made. Von der Lancken desired to know who were the members of the Commission whose neutrality he doubted, but Hoover said that he could not disclose this, as it was no discredit to the men and that he preferred to have the matter left to him. Von der Lancken then expressed himself as being gratified at Mr. Hoover's statement and agreed that the whole incident was thus closed.

**The Origin of the Espionage Charges.**—It was ultimately discovered by Mr. Hoover that the story at the bottom of these espionage charges against the three members of the Commission was undoubtedly due to the indiscretion of the man at the Rotterdam office whom von der Lancken had mentioned. This man seems to have been somewhat unbalanced mentally and engaged in a whole series of intrigues during his time in Holland. He intrigued against the director in the office. Not satisfied he got into touch with the German intelligence staff at The Hague and poured out to them all the indiscreet remarks, gossip and information that he had picked up in the Commission's office. These things were, of course, passed on to the authorities in Belgium and led to the charges of espionage. Later, this same man attempted to put himself in touch with the English intelligence officers and professed to be in a position to provide them with regular and authentic reports of the German military operations in Belgium. On making these discoveries, the man was, of course, removed from the Rotterdam office and sent back to America.

There he immediately became associated with one of the leading pro-Germans in New York. Among all the men who have served the Commission there were but a few black sheep, but this man was undoubtedly one of the blackest of the black, as with no motive at all except petty personal spite he brought the whole of the Commission in peril by the spreading of various false reports of its activities. Fortunately, however, the matter was checked in time and his activities brought to an end before the work of the Commission was seriously endangered.

**The Relations between the C.R.B. and the Vermittlungsstelle.**—The result of the whole matter, so far as the work in Belgium was concerned, was the organisation of the Vermittlungsstelle. This proved to be an event of capital importance. It regularised the relations between the Commission and the German authorities. It provided for a direct means of co-operation between the Commission and the General Government. The officers in charge of the Vermittlungsstelle were throughout men of the highest character who understood and spoke English perfectly and who had experience in dealing with Americans. Their attitude was almost uniformly sympathetic towards the Commission and they were unsparing in their efforts to assist it in the solution of difficult problems which arose from day to day and week to week in the natural development of the relief operations in the territory of the General Government. After the creation of the Vermittlungsstelle most of the causes of friction and misunderstandings were removed. The German Government kept more closely in touch with the operations of the Commission and, being more thoroughly informed as to its real character, came to regard it with much greater sympathy. The direct intervention of German officers made it possible for the Commission to obtain immediate decisions on important matters and all the exasperating delays previously encountered

were eliminated. Thus, out of an incident which threatened to put an end to the Commission's work, there came a solution to many of the Commission's difficulties. From December 1915 until April 1917 the Commission continued to work through the Vermittlungsstelle, and although there arose from time to time differences of opinion between the Commission and German officers detailed to the Vermittlungsstelle, on the whole the relations were marked by complete harmony and close co-operation.

## A SUMMARY OF THE FIRST YEAR OF WORK

**Statistics of the First Year's Food Shipments.**— It would perhaps be interesting at this point, in order to illustrate the work done by the Commission during the first year, to give a few essential facts about the actual achievements of the Commission during the year.

From October 22, 1914, when the Commission was organised, to October 31, 1915, a total of 988,852 tons of foodstuffs was delivered at Rotterdam. It had required 186 full cargoes, averaging 4,637 tons each, and 308 part cargoes, averaging 209 tons each, to deliver these supplies. After the first months there were on an average four full cargoes a week arriving at Rotterdam. The total purchase value of these foodstuffs was £11,401,637. The cost of transportation and insurance incurred in delivering these supplies in Rotterdam was £2,215,473; making a total of £13,617,110 as the cost to the Commission of the food delivered in Rotterdam.

During the same period 906,875 tons of food was shipped into Belgium and Northern France and distributed among the various provinces according to the proportion and percentage agreed upon from time to time.

**The Cost of Food to the Belgians.**— For the twelve months the Commission was able to deliver its food to the consumers in Belgium at an average price less than that in London. Thus the average cost of white bread in Brussels for the twelve months was 44 centimes per kilo, while in London the price was equivalent to an average of 45 centimes and in Rotterdam 47½. The grey bread sold in Belgium, in the Hainaut for example, was delivered to the consumers at an average price of 38 centimes per kilo. In the case of some of the other commodities the economies effected by the Commission are even more remarkable. Thus the average price to the consumer in Belgium of rice was 61 centimes per kilo, while in London the average price was 94 centimes. For beans and peas, the average maximum price to the consumer was 78 centimes per kilo; in London the average retail price was 82 centimes. In Belgium the maximum price of bacon averaged 2 francs a kilo against the price of 2.75 in London; lard, similarly, was sold at the average maximum price of 1.70 in Belgium and at 1.90 in London.

These maximum sale prices included also a margin of from 10 to 50 per cent. profit, which the Comité National was allowed to take, in the sale of commodities to the comparatively well-to-do, to support its benevolent department.

**The Sums Handled by the Commission.**— During the first twelve months the Commission had expended a total of £17,257,591 for the purchase of food and for its delivery to Belgium. (This sum included the cost of cargoes purchased or *en route* on October 31, 1915.) As a result of the favourable exchange arrangements secured by the Commission in transmitting money from London to New York, a sum of \$509,660.30 was realised above

what would have been obtained if the Commission had secured only the ordinary rates. This sum was slightly more than the entire overhead charges of the Commission during the first year of work, since these overhead charges amounted to only £101,994 14s. 10d., i.e. about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of 1 per cent. of the total value of the supplies handled. When one remembers that in ordinary commercial practices the overhead expenses amount to from  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 5 per cent., this achievement seems all the more remarkable. This low overhead charge was made possible by the volunteer direction of the Commission and by the great amount of volunteer assistance which it received in carrying out its work. During these twelve months a profit of £1,138,411 2s. 9d. was realised on the sale of foodstuffs in Belgium, and this sum was turned over to the benevolent department. It represented about 9 per cent. of the total value of supplies handled.

The low prices charged the consumers in Belgium, together with the profit earned for the benefit of the destitute, were not obtained through any reduction in the quality of the food delivered. On the contrary, because of the long period required for transportation to Belgium and because of the general conditions under which the food had to be handled, the Commission purchased only the first quality merchandise.

**Governmental Subsidies.**—Up to October 31, 1915, the Commission had received from the Belgian Government a total sum equivalent to £10,860,300 16s. 8d., equivalent to a sum of frs. 275,851,639.90, at the exchange rate of 25.40 for the pound sterling, which had been agreed upon at the beginning of the Commission's work as the exchange figure to be used by the Commission in all transactions involving exchange from one currency to another. In addition to this sum, the Commission had also received from the Belgian Government as subsidies for the support of the French work the sum of frs. 95,000,000, making a total of some 360 million francs or roughly  $14\frac{1}{2}$  million pounds sterling received during the first year from governmental sources.

**Donations to the Benevolent Department.**—In addition the Commission received from private sources in the form of gifts, food amounting to a value of £1,279,416 16s. 9d. and cash donations amounting to slightly over £1,500,000.

These figures give a brief statistical summary of the first year's work in Belgium and Northern France. For more complete statistics the reader is referred to the annual reports of the Commission. In these will be found complete details about the distribution of foodstuffs inside Belgium and about all other matters connected with the Commission's work.

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## CHAPTER X

NEW NEGOTIATIONS TO PROTECT INDIGENOUS PRODUCTS  
IN BELGIUM

## THE QUESTION OF INSPECTION AND CONTROL

**Loopholes are discovered in the Organisation in Belgium.**—By the end of the year 1915 the work of the Commission seemed superficially to be functioning perfectly. The stream of foodstuffs was flowing uninterruptedly into Belgium, through the regional and local warehouses to the actual consumer. But, in the building up of so great and complicated an organisation as was required to feed a nation under war conditions, the measures adopted had often been opportunist in character, intended as purely temporary expedients. The difficulties that the Commission had to meet, practically, in working out an efficient system of distributing rations to the Belgian population and in purchasing and shipping the food to the various warehouses in Belgium, and, diplomatically, in having to constantly satisfy the two groups of belligerents that each was living up to its guarantees, were so great that technical efficiency of organisation had often to be sacrificed to the necessity of immediate action. This was especially true in the matter of the control of the imported foodstuffs and the protection of those native foodstuffs which the Germans had promised to reserve to the use of the Belgian population. The central office at Brussels until the end of 1915 had worked out no definite system for the detailed inspection of the relief operations. The American delegates in the various provinces, in co-operation with the provincial committees, had been left to devise their own systems of distribution and to establish their own methods of inspection and control.

**Early methods of Controlling the Belgian Food Supply.**—The method of controlling distribution and preventing fraud and leakage to the Germans had therefore varied greatly in the different provinces. But, as Mr. J. C. Green pointed out in his report on the work of the department of inspection and control,\* ‘the organisation in the various provinces was based on the same principles and presented the same general characteristics. A census was made, as conditions would permit, of the population, and the foodstuffs allotted to each province were divided among the regions on the basis of the figures obtained. The regional committees divided their stocks among the local committees on the same basis, and a careful system of checks was devised to ascertain that this division and subdivision was made in conformity with the population’s figures of the various units. The local committees carried out the distribution to the people largely on their own responsibility and in accordance with their own ideas of the needs of the population. Some regulations of course there were. General methods were suggested, and in some cases were imposed, by the provincial and regional committees. . . .

‘From the very beginning a certain amount of inspection of the operations of the

\* Published by the C.R.B. in vol. II of its Second Annual Report.

local committees was seen to be necessary. The American representatives, having special privileges of circulation of automobiles, carried out a great deal of this inspection personally. The delegates of the Comité National and energetic members of the provincial committees also made frequent tours for the purpose of supervising the operations of the local committees and of suggesting methods to be employed. Such inspection was, however, inadequate, and organised bodies of inspectors were sent out in certain provinces. Their chief duty consisted in verifying the population figures with a view to seeing that no locality received a larger portion of foodstuffs than was its due.'

**New Measures of Control in 1915.**—Of course it was only natural that men engaged in a task which they thought would come to an end in a few months should be content with more or less temporary measures. In the beginning no one had realised that the work of relief would go on for years. This realisation only came in the autumn of 1915. At that time a more complete organisation was designed by the Comité National, and more definite instructions as to the functioning of the various committees, the methods of food distribution, and the means of controlling effectively relief operations, were sent out by the Comité National and by the provincial and regional committees as well. All these instructions were drawn up as a result of agreements with the Commission and in consequence of its insistence on making the relief organisation more efficient. There had appeared in the allied press from time to time during the early part of the Commission's work various exaggerated reports of conditions in the occupied territories. These had aroused so much opposition to the Commission that it became necessary to suppress the illicit traffic in foodstuffs and to provide more efficient control of the distribution of food.

**Fraudulent Trafficking in Foodstuffs.**—The great shortage of food in Belgium and the fact that the situation in the industrial areas was much worse than in the agricultural communes led to the development of considerable fraud in connection with imported foodstuffs. Traders went about buying up rations at high prices from people who had other means of support. The stocks thus accumulated, which often were very considerable, were sold in the industrial and urban regions. A certain proportion of these stocks were also purchased by German agents who were engaged in supplying the army or in shipping food to Germany. This constituted a great danger to the relief operations, for repeated reports went out to Great Britain of this fraudulent trafficking in food and of occasional diversions of relief supplies to the Germans. The result was an increase of the opposition to the Commission's work on the part of the war extremists in Great Britain.

**Difficulties experienced in controlling Local Committees.**—One of the great difficulties in the establishing of efficient methods of controlling relief food lay in the character of the Belgian people and of the nature of their system of local governments. Before the war the Belgian communes had enjoyed extreme independence and a great amount of power in matters of administration. The local committees, since they were often composed of communal officials, were therefore inclined to object to any attempt of the superior committees to dictate to them the conditions under which food should be distributed. They regarded such instructions as they received as unjust and unnecessary interferences in matters which concerned only the commune. In many cases, too, the pride of the Belgian peasant-administrator was deeply offended by these instructions, which he considered a reflection on the methods in use in his commune. Therefore, in spite of many efforts on the part of the Comité National and the American delegates to increase the efficiency

of the systems of inspection and regulation which had developed in the various parts of Belgium, most of the provinces were slow to effect any improvements or to recognise the seriousness of the situation. Each provincial committee, though aware of the prevalence of illicit traffic in imported foods, was usually content to believe that this illicit traffic was confined to the other provinces and that they themselves were not affected by the criticisms.

**The Problem of Protecting the Native Products.**—In addition to the difficulties involved in the control of the imported foodstuffs, there came also new complications as a result of the diversion to Germany of Belgian produce. The guarantees given by the Governor-General in July 1915 provided that only the cereals of Belgium used in making bread and the other articles of native production of the kinds imported by the Commission (that is, peas, beans, rice, maize, bacon and lard) should be exempt from requisition. There still existed in Belgium at the end of 1915 a very large number of cattle, sheep, and hogs. The Germans during the late months of the year began to considerably increase their purchases of meat and of animals in Belgium. Large shipments were made by German traders, often working through Belgian agents, to the German armies on the western front and directly to Germany. Reports of these shipments from Belgium began to reach the British Foreign Office in increasing numbers. This exploitation of Belgian produce for the benefit of the Germans revived a new storm of criticism against the Commission and against the British Government for its support of the Commission. At the same time there were appearing in the allied press recurrent statements that imported articles as well as native products were finding their way into the hands of the Germans.

**The Program of Food Importation.**—Until the end of 1915 the Commission had not had the quantity of its imports limited by the British Government. The program that had been drawn up in June 1915 by Francqui and Hoover provided for the importation of definite monthly quantities of the various articles of food. The only limitation imposed by the British Government had been that contained in the letter of the Marquis of Crewe of July 7. This had provided that the Commission could import only wheat and rye for bread making and, in addition, peas, beans, rice, maize 'for human consumption,' bacon and lard. This limitation was merely a governmental recognition of the decision reached by the Comité National and the Commission to limit their future imports to the articles named. Nothing had been said by the British Foreign Office about the quantities of these various articles that might be imported, and in fact the only limitation of the Commission's imports was the amount of money available.

As a result of the arrangements made in the summer of 1915 for the continuation of monthly subsidies from the Belgian Government to the Commission, the Commission was able in the autumn of 1915 to make considerable greater shipments to Belgium than in the preceding winter. The shipments by the Commission had increased monthly from 26,471 tons in November 1914 to 124,673 tons in May 1915. From May until September the shipments were smaller and in the month of August only 48,359 tons were imported. The new shipping program went into effect in September, when 68,754 tons were imported. In October 134,464 tons were received at Rotterdam, the largest monthly quantity since the beginning of the work.

**The increase of Bacon and Lard Shipments.**—Until June 1915 very little bacon, lard or meat had been introduced into Belgium, only 5,151 tons in seven months, or a monthly average of about 750 tons. With the month of June, however, there began a very notable increase in the bacon and lard shipments to Belgium. In the six months

from the beginning of June to the end of November, 30,095 tons of bacon and lard were delivered at Rotterdam, that is, an average of 5,000 tons a month. This very considerable increase in the meat and fat shipments occurred therefore at the same time that the reports were being received by the British Government of the increasing diversion of Belgian products, and especially of meat, to German uses. The Commission had not developed any such complete method of control as to be able to give the British Government satisfactory assurances in all cases. In view of the increasing attacks on the Commission and on the policy of permitting food to go to Belgium, the British Government therefore decided to reconsider the whole question of Belgian relief.

#### THE DEMANDS OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT, DECEMBER 1915— JANUARY 1916

The British Government suspends the Bacon and Lard Shipments.—The official notice to the Commission of the decision of the British Government to reconsider its attitude was made known formally to the Commission December 13, 1915. The Commission Internationale de Ravitaillement (Allied Control Board) was instructed by the British Government not to grant any further applications of the Commission for Relief in Belgium for permits to ship lard and bacon to Belgium. In a letter of December 13, 1915, Lord Eustace Percy informed Mr. Hoover of this decision. He added: 'I think you had better suspend all shipments of lard from America for the present. . . . In fact, the question now before us is whether we must not now put in force against the Commission the clause in our arrangements as to stopping importations when these constitute replacement of stocks taken by the Germans. I should like to impress on you strongly the necessity at this moment of keeping strictly within as small a program as possible, and, above all, neither to make nor propose any shipments which are not well below the mark of normal importation.'

On the same day, December 13, the British Consul-General in Rotterdam notified the local office of the Commission to hold up all shipments of pork products and meat to Belgium until further notice. Hoover immediately informed Lord Eustace Percy that the wishes of the British Government would be respected, and that if the cargoes *en route* to Rotterdam should be allowed to continue their voyage, the Commission would guarantee that the stocks would be held at Rotterdam.

Discussions of the Situation in Belgium.—In the following weeks there were almost constant conferences or interchanges of communications between the Foreign Office and the Commission in regard to the whole question of shipments into Belgium. The British Government gave as an explanation for their action their belief that the Commission's imports were in reality replacing articles produced in Belgium which were taken by the Germans. Thus, in a letter of December 16, Lord Eustace Percy said: 'In view of action by the Germans, which appears *prima facie* to infringe their undertakings, and in view of grave doubts which have arisen as to whether certain of these imports had not, in effect, constituted a replacement of articles bought or otherwise taken by the Germans, it is necessary to restrict your activities for the moment. You have already been asked, and have undertaken, to ship no further consignments of meat, bacon, lard or other pork products from Rotterdam, either to Belgium or France, until further notice. I must now



ask you also to stop all shipments from Rotterdam to Belgium of soap, coffee, sugar, oil or margarine materials, butter, salt, groceries, cheese, dried fruit, vegetables and yeast materials. The only shipments which you may still make to Belgium from Rotterdam will therefore be wheat, rice, beans, maize, fish, cocoa, medical supplies and clothing for relief purposes. . . . As the conditions in Northern France are somewhat different, I do not want to ask you to cut off any importations into France from Rotterdam except meat, bacon, lard and all pork products, as already arranged, and also soap. . . . I do not want to close this letter without saying, what you already know, that these restrictions of your activities arise out of the exigencies of the situation and imply no loss of confidence in you or in the members of the Commission.'

The Commission pleads the case for the Belgians.—The Commission at once prepared to strongly defend the case of Belgium before the British Government. The Comité National had just formulated a new program of importations which called for 130,000 tons of food to be imported each month. This increase was justified on the ground that the amount of destitution in Belgium was rapidly increasing, while at the same time the native food-supplies were becoming constantly scarcer. Reports of the Brussels office of the Commission confirmed the report of the situation given by the Comité National. It was emphasised especially that the need for lard and bacon was very great because native meats were too high in price to be within the reach of the labouring classes. Hoover had several conferences with the representatives of the Foreign Office to discuss the situation. On December 16 he wrote a long letter to Lord Eustace Percy giving in detail the situation in Belgium as regards bacon and lard and explaining the Commission's shipments and methods of control. Four days later, on December 20, Hoover wrote Lord Eustace Percy again on the same subject, enclosing a report from the Brussels office on the need for bacon and lard, the system of distribution and the method of control, and declaring that the amount of meat and fat that was sent to Germany from Belgium was inconsiderable. On December 21, at the request of Lord Eustace Percy, Hoover sent to the Foreign Office memoranda giving the imports of the various foods desired by the Comité National and the Commission and explaining the reason for the need of each article. The first memorandum dealt with the situation in Belgium; the second gave the same information in regard to Northern France. These memoranda were accompanied by a table showing the quantities of various foodstuffs which the Commission believed it should be permitted to send to Belgium.

On December 23 Hoover was summoned before a sub-committee of the War Trade Advisory Committee, that had been appointed by the British Government to investigate the question of Belgian relief. At this session of December 23, presided over by Lord Islington, Mr. Hoover gave, in answer to the questions of the committee, a complete statement of the situation in Belgium, of the amount of food sent in by the Commission, of the system of distribution to the consumers, and of the methods of control to prevent fraud and to keep the supplies from getting into the hands of the Germans.

The letters, memoranda and the testimony of Mr. Hoover, referred to above, constitute a practically complete survey of the case presented by the Commission with the object of securing permission to continue to send a sufficient quantity of food to Belgium to provide the bare minimum of foodstuffs needed to keep the civil population in good health. The documents mentioned are too long to be given in full here. It will, however, be necessary to quote from them at some length in order to give a clear picture of the situation

in Belgium at the end of December 1915 and to explain the basis on which the Commission made its appeal to the British Government.

**The need for Bacon and Lard in the Occupied Territories.**—In his letter of December 16, Hoover went into great detail to justify the Commission's shipments of lard and bacon to Northern France and to Belgium. He stated that from August 1 to December 13, 10,466 tons of lard and bacon had been sent to Northern France and 16,048 tons to Belgium; that in France the ration distributed had amounted to only half an ounce of lard and half an ounce of bacon per day (that is,  $16\frac{1}{2}$  grammes of each article); but that it was now necessary 'that the ration of lard should be doubled for these people, bringing it up to about one ounce per day. This would mean the importation into Northern France of 2,000 tons of lard and 1,000 tons of bacon each month. Generally, as to the feeding of these people, I may say at once that they are practically absolutely without supplies other than which is procured through us. . . . The rapid and almost total disappearance of butter and other edible fats, especially among the lower classes, has made lard and bacon practically the only fats which we are able to supply to these people. The meat supply has long since gone, except for the most wealthy of the population, and even these are crying out for the importation of some kind of preserved meat.'

In Belgium, according to this letter, there still existed a certain local supply of bacon, lard and butter, but the prices were so high 'that they are no longer within the reach of even people of moderate means and are totally out of the reach of the communal relief committees which are taking care of the destitute. Gradually we have had to extend the range of the people who receive a ration of bacon and lard until it is only a question of time when we shall need to issue a ration on the French basis to the bulk of the Belgian people, and in that case there will be required 3,500 tons of bacon and 7,000 tons of lard per month for Belgium alone.' The need in Belgium was so great, explained Mr. Hoover, because the normal imports of edible fats had been stopped and because there had been an enormous diminution in the number of cattle and, as a result, a shortage in the local butter supplies. The number of live pigs had decreased perhaps 60 per cent., and this had further cut down the supplies of fats normally thrown on the Belgian market. This diminution in the number of live stock was due to the fact that the Belgians, unable to obtain the usual quantities of fodder, had been forced to reduce the number of their animals. At the same time the shortage of other foods and the small ration of bread had led to an increase in meat consumption. Consequently, the number of animals had been greatly reduced and the amount of meat that would be available in the future would be insufficient to meet the needs.

**The system of Food Distribution in Belgium.**—In the same letter Hoover sketched the system of distribution in Belgium as follows: 'We maintain a system of about 125 district warehouses under our direct control throughout Belgium. The foodstuffs are shipped, under seal and under our own flag, to these warehouses and from these centres the commodities are drawn weekly by the communal committees and placed in the communal warehouses. At these warehouses the bacon and lard are distributed daily or weekly on the production of a ration ticket entitling the holder to his rations. These tickets are issued by a separate committee whose business it is to make sure as to the civilian character of the holder and to determine whether the tickets shall be given free, as in the case of the destitute; partially paid for, as in the case of those who have resources; or paid for in full, as is done by those who still have means. As a check on this system we maintain a series

of inspectors, and we require a monthly return from the communal warehouses as to the foodstuffs which they issue. These are all totalled up and compared with the deliveries from the regional warehouses. . . .

'I think you may take it as absolute that it is thus utterly impossible that this food material should reach the hands of the military, unless it were deliberately seized, in which case it would come to our knowledge, or unless some Belgian took his maximum individual allowance of 7 ozs. and resold it. The Belgians themselves are obviously alive to the necessity of rigorous guardianship of the distribution of supplies and are most zealous in the matter.'

**The Report of the Brussels Office.**—The memorandum of the Brussels office gave a general summary of the situation in Belgium practically identical to that already given by Hoover. The Brussels office estimated that the essential food-supplies in Belgium consumed since the war amounted in quantity to only one-third of the pre-war consumption of the same articles. The people were eating on the whole a bread ration two-thirds less than that to which they had been accustomed in time of peace. The supply of fresh meat had decreased to an estimated amount of 3,650 tons per month. Consequently the Brussels office declared that the shortages of meat and fats would have to be replaced by importation of bacon and lard.

In regard to the matter of leakage of foodstuffs to Germany, the Brussels office reported that the export of pigs and pork products from Belgium to Germany was prohibited and that none were being exported. It was estimated that no cattle had been exported to Germany during the last six months, but that, on the contrary, 200,000 head of cattle had been shipped from Germany to Northern France and parts of Belgium for grazing and for use as a food-supply. The German army had sold meat to the civil population of Northern France. Similarly the export of butter to Germany was prohibited without special permit and the total quantity shipped was inconsiderable. The Germans had established an oil centrale in Belgium to collect materials for the manufacture of margarine, but only one-third of these were shipped to Germany. The export of grease and tallow to Germany were prohibited. These statements of the Brussels office were made on the basis of declarations of officers of the highest standing in the General Government and were to all intents official.

**The Estimated Needs of Belgium and Northern France.**—In the memoranda of December 21, tables of the estimated needs of Belgium and Northern France were submitted. These were as follows:—

	Northern France.	Belgium.	Total.
Wheat (or flour) .. ..	16,000	54,000	70,000
Lard .. ..	2,200	7,000	9,200
Bacon .. ..	1,650	3,500	5,150
Rice .. ..	4,400	5,000	9,400
Condensed Milk .. ..	1,650	1,000	2,650
Beans and Peas .. ..	1,650	4,000	5,650
Maize .. ..	2,200	20,000	22,200
Sugar .. ..	1,320	2,000	3,320
Coffee .. ..	1,100	2,000	3,100
Salt .. ..	1,320	—	1,320
Soap .. ..	1,100	1,000	2,100

	Northern France.	Belgium.	Total.
Potatoes .. .. .	13,200	10,000	23,200
Salad Oils .. .. .	330	400	730
Carbide .. .. .	500	—	500
Preserved Meat .. .. .	1,000	1,500	2,500
Preserved Fish .. .. .	300	400	700
Cocoa .. .. .	—	1,000	1,000
Oleo Margarine Materials .. .. .	—	1,000	1,000
Butter .. .. .	—	500	500
Dried Fruit (say) .. .. .	—	100	100
Linseed Cake .. .. .	—	10,000	10,000
Cheese .. .. .	—	2,000	2,000
Yeast Materials .. .. .	—	—	—
Medical Supplies .. .. .	—	—	—
Clothing for Destitute .. .. .	—	—	—
Petrol, Tyres and Spares .. .. .	—	—	—

In each case the estimated requirement represented the minimum needs as calculated by the Comité National. The estimates for Northern France were based on a program drawn up by the district committees and the members of the Commission, for the first four months of the year 1916. It was agreed that this program represented the absolute minimum supply necessary to preserve the health of the population.

**Hoover's Testimony before the War Trade Advisory Committee.**—In his evidence before the War Trade Advisory Committee, Hoover pointed out that all food imported by the Commission, except bread, was distributed through communal depôts; that the distribution was protected through the issuance of ration cards and through effective supervision by the Belgian committees and by the American delegates. The bakers in most cases were allowed to sell bread directly to consumers, but the bakers were required to furnish certified lists of their customers and were only permitted to supply each customer with 300 grammes of bread per day. Hoover said also that the bacon and lard were not supplied to the entire population but had been issued only to the destitute or very poor. He pointed out that the Commission and the Comité National controlled the Belgian harvest of breadstuffs, and consequently the bread supply of the country, except for a quantity of about 700 tons a week sent into Belgium by a Dutch committee. He described the meat situation in Belgium and said that without large fodder imports the farmers could not maintain their stock; that consequently it was to be expected that many of the Belgians should freely sell their animals, even to the Germans if the latter were willing to pay.

**The Commission and the Belgian Meat Supply.**—A member of the committee at this point remarked: 'It is quite evident that if the Belgian sells his cattle to the Germans we cannot be expected to replace that meat. It surely must have occurred to the Commission as to whether you should not yourselves buy the cattle from the Belgians. When once you start on this sort of organisation it spreads out until you do not quite know where you are getting to.' Continuing, the same member of the committee said: 'Granted that the cattle have got to be sold, why should they not sell them to you? You could make any arrangements you like and import your own fodder, and then turn them into meat and fat and resell them to the Belgians in that form.'

Hoover suggests that Exports from Belgium be Stopped. Hoover in reply to this suggestion said that it would be a most appalling undertaking to take over all the abattoirs in Belgium and attempt to handle the meat supply. He thought the problem of controlling meat was not so complicated or difficult as to require such action on the part of the Commission. 'If the Germans exported no cattle from the occupation zone, that would appear to me to be the only solution. There is no doubt that the price of meat to-day in Belgium is outrageous and is due more or less to the purchase of cattle, and is therefore a vicious circle unless one imports sufficient food. I do not know whether the cattle in Belgium could survive, and unless the Belgians sold them they have no alternative. . . . It appears to me that the furthest you can go with any hope of success would be the insistence on stoppage of export from Belgium. If that were done it would mean that only the army of occupation would remain to participate in the meat supply, and that is nothing to worry about.' Hoover continued that he thought it would not be difficult to enforce such a prohibition of the export of meat, as the General Government in Belgium were usually zealous enough against the surrounding military governments.

**Destitution in the Occupied Territories.**—In answer to questions about the reason for the increase in shipments of bacon and lard by the Commission, Hoover restated the arguments already advanced in his letters, pointing out that the Commission was not attempting to distribute bacon and lard to the whole population but only to the destitute. He said that the number of such destitute in Belgium at that time was probably 2,750,000; that there were 1,200,000 totally destitute; that between 500,000 and 750,000 paid perhaps 20 per cent. of the value of their rations; and, that, finally, there were about 1,000,000 who were paying 50 per cent. or more of the cost of their rations. The balance of the population was made up of 1,000,000 of the agricultural class who could provide their own food; of 1,000,000 of the working class who were still self-supporting; and the remaining 2,000,000 belonged to the upper and middle classes who could probably still buy all their own food except bread.

In Northern France, Mr. Hoover said, the situation was entirely different. There the cattle and nearly all the meat supply were gone, and out of the 2,200,000 population approximately 60 per cent. were absolutely destitute. Consequently, the whole of the French population, so far as the need for food was concerned, had to be considered as being in the same category as the 1,200,000 completely destitute in Belgium.

In answer to questions, Hoover said that there were altogether in Belgium and France approximately 6,000,000 people, 4,000,000 in Belgium and 2,000,000 in France, who needed to be fully rationed. In addition to the food for the destitute in Belgium, it was practically necessary that the Commission should also import food for the 1,000,000 of the working class who were still supporting themselves by continuing work in the mines, small industries and commerce. To provide for these people, 10,000 tons of bacon and lard would be required monthly, but the amount which the Commission could purchase would depend upon its financial resources. He explained that 'the French Government have undertaken to pay for the cost of the work in Northern France. For Belgium we have an advance of 25,000,000 francs per month from the Belgian Government, which is in turn received from the allied governments. The total of our Belgian budget at the present moment is 38,000,000 francs a month, leaving a deficit of 13,000,000 francs which we have got financed outside.' Hoover explained that often the Commission was able to secure money in London toward this 13,000,000 francs, through normal commercial exchange,

but that this was always uncertain and that the liabilities of the Commission exceeded its cash assets by about £1,000,000.

**The question of Reviving Belgian Industries.**—When asked if the Commission could not do something to revive industries in Belgium and secure additional commercial exchange through exporting the manufactured articles, Hoover said that the point had been raised by the Commission in May 1915 and that long negotiations had ensued without any definite result. The English Government had agreed in principle that raw materials could be imported by the Commission, provided the Germans would permit the Commission to control the industries and export the products. The German Government, however, had held back and nothing was yet settled.

**The British Government withdraws its ban on Shipments.**—On December 24, the day following his examination before the committee, Mr. Hoover was notified by Lord Eustace Percy that pending the final settlement of the question, which could be expected in about a week, the Commission could resume its shipments to Belgium at the temporary rate of 3,200 tons for France and 3,700 tons for Belgium monthly. The Commission immediately began shipments from Rotterdam on this basis. It was not until the end of February that the program of imports was finally fixed by the Foreign Office.

**The Foreign Office Note of December 31, 1915.**—The official statement of the Foreign Office as to the continuation of the Commission's shipments was made by Sir Edward Grey on December 31, 1915, in a letter to the American Ambassador. In this letter Sir Edward stated that a very critical situation had arisen regarding the affairs of the Commission and that he wished to state briefly the views of His Majesty's Government. The Germans, he said, may have observed formally the undertaking given on December 31, 1914, by Zimmermann to Gerard not to requisition 'food or forage of any kind whatsoever which would require to be replaced by importations by the American committee for Belgium relief,' but this undertaking had never been observed in spirit. The Germans, for example, between June 1 and June 10, had shipped 4,070 tons of fat and oils from Belgium to Germany, although the Commission had imported between November 1914 and July 1915 only 6,675 tons of bacon and lard. Furthermore, the Germans had interpreted their undertaking as applying only to the very small number of products on the Commission's lists of imports, and had requisitioned or bought large quantities of other native supplies, which practically had to be replaced by the foods imported by the Commission. This was especially true in the case of meat, the Germans having bought large quantities of pigs and cattle in Belgium for the army. The Germans had carried out the same policy even more notably in the case of industrial raw materials and manufactured products and was thereby draining the wealth of Belgium. 'Moreover,' wrote Sir Edward, 'Germany has invented a method of facilitating this process. She has exacted, and still exacts, a levy of 40,000,000 francs a month from Belgium in the form of a special note issue. This levy provides abundant cheap currency with which Belgian products may be purchased and the country is thus drained of its resources in exchange for worthless paper of German invention.

'The result of this process has been clearly seen in the last few months. The Commission, which had expected to be able to reduce its activities after the harvest, has increased them. It has made a series of new requests for import permits in respect to various fresh articles of food and it has largely increased its importations of bacon and lard. It is planning to import large quantities of clothing for the destitute. This gradual expansion cannot continue, and, within the last few days, as your Excellency is aware, His Majesty's Govern-

ment have felt themselves obliged to suspend temporarily the importation of various articles into Belgium by the Commission. The time has therefore arrived when the whole of the work must be placed on a more clearly defined basis.'

Sir Edward went on to state that the undertaking given by the British Government in July to continue to issue permits for the Commission's imports had been made on the expressed condition that no foodstuffs should be imported which would be a practical replacement of foodstuffs requisitioned or purchased in Belgium by the German authorities. 'In view of the information received by the British Government, they can no longer tolerate the situation that has grown up in Belgium. His Majesty's Government are therefore about to lay down a program of imports for the Commission which will be regarded as final. However long the German occupation of Belgium may continue, this program will in no circumstances be expanded. Further, His Majesty's Government must make the following stipulations, which appear to be the minimum, to safeguard the livelihood of the Belgian people.

The Stipulations of the Foreign Office as to the Relief Work.—' 1. The export of all foodstuffs and substances fit for use as food, including livestock and fodder of all kinds, and also all fertilisers, seeds and agricultural stock of every sort, shall be absolutely prohibited from the territory administered by the Governor-General of Belgium to any destination whatever, with the one exception that the Commission for Relief in Belgium may be allowed to export to Northern France, for distribution there by them, foodstuffs of which there is a clear surplus over and above the present or future needs of Belgium.

' 2. The export of all articles of clothing and of all raw materials for their manufacture shall be prohibited except to neutral countries, and then only after full provision has been made for the present and future needs of the civil population, including the destitute.

' 3. None of these articles above mentioned shall on any account be used by the German army of occupation in Belgium.

' 4. These prohibitions shall be rigorously maintained without exception of any kind.

' 5. The Commission shall be allowed to exercise any control over the stocks mentioned in the preceding paragraphs which may be necessary in order to conserve them for the future or make them available for the present needs of the population.

' If these steps are not taken His Majesty's Government will hold themselves entitled to reconsider their whole attitude toward the Commission, since its work will have become, through no fault of its own, a method of replacement instead of one of relief and an encouragement to the Germans to deplete the resources of the country. In that case, I shall have no choice but to publish the documents showing the conditions which have obliged His Majesty's Government to change their views.'

The New Negotiations imposed on the Commission.—The points made by Sir Edward Grey in this letter were in part justified by the conditions which had grown up in Belgium. There was no question but that the Germans, by taking food from the country, considerably reduced the supplies for the population and increased the burden of the Commission. The demands of the British Foreign Office made it necessary to undertake a new series of negotiations with the Germans in the endeavour to get them to grant the demands. These were of so far-reaching a character that the task before Mr. Hoover was extremely difficult. The Germans were beginning themselves to feel the effects of the blockade. Their own food was growing shorter and was strictly rationed. There were already many complaints in Germany, occasionally even in the Reichstag, that the Belgian people were

receiving more food than the German people. Consequently any demand on the part of the Commission that the Germans should cease taking any supplies whatsoever from Belgium was bound to arouse great opposition in Germany. The shortage of foodstuffs in Germany made it, however, all the more necessary to the Germans that the Commission's imports into Belgium should be continued. Otherwise the Germans would be compelled either to take food from their own stores for the Belgians or face the consequences of a famine in Belgium.

There was no question about the seriousness of the British demand. This was emphasised by Lord Eustace Percy when he sent a copy of the letter of Sir Edward Grey to Mr. Hoover. 'In face of German policy we feel obliged to force the reservations of local stocks in Belgium for the exclusive use of the population by cutting off the prospect of any increased importations. I know that this development and our attitude comes as a surprise to you, and I am sorry to be obliged to communicate to you unexpected demands so soon after your return from Belgium, but these demands are clearly justified by the situation and their rejection would, I fear, have far-reaching consequences which I do not like to contemplate.'

**Further Difficulties resulting from Illicit Traffic in Belgium.**—The objections and demands made by the British Government were not limited to those mentioned in Sir Edward Grey's letter. During the course of the month of January 1916 there came still further developments which served to increase the difficulty and embarrassment of the Commission. On January 25 Lord Eustace Percy communicated to Mr. Hoover the decision of the Foreign Office that the Commission should not be allowed to ship any more maize for fodder purposes into Belgium until further notice. This action of the Foreign Office was caused by a communication made by the German Government to the effect that 80,000 head of cattle were pastured in Belgium in the spring of 1915 and similar action would be taken in the spring of 1916. As part of the resources of Belgium were apparently to be devoted to the maintenance of German livestock, a proceeding equivalent to the export of fodder, the British Government decided to stop the import of 20,000 tons of maize per month by the Commission.

Meanwhile the Foreign Office had received further reports of illicit trafficking in imported foods in Belgium and of the export of various quantities of food and especially rice from Antwerp to Germany. The total quantity of goods so exported was supposed to amount to 18,000 kilograms. In a letter of January 21, 1916, the Foreign Office informed Mr. Hoover of the receipt of these reports and ordered the Commission to stop immediately all shipments of rice into Belgium. The situation was all the more serious as the letter in fact called into question the efficiency of the methods of controlling imported food if not of the whole organisation of the Commission and Comité National. The British Government implied that if such abuses were repeated it would put an end to the relief work.

It became necessary therefore to satisfy the British Government, not only by obtaining new assurances from the Germans, but also by making such changes and improvements in the methods of control in Belgium as would convince the British Government that the Germans were being held to a strict observance of the assurances already given. For convenience sake the story of the negotiations with the Germans for the protection of native foodstuffs will be told first, and the creation of the service of inspection and control will be described in the next chapter.



## RESTRICTIONS OF IMPORTS IMPOSED BY THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT

The Program as fixed by the Foreign Office.—The Foreign Office and the various Government Boards concerned made a thorough examination of the Commission's shipping program, and on February 23 were able to make a definite announcement of the quantities which the Commission would be permitted to ship each month into Belgium. No change was made in the quantities of wheat to be shipped as it was agreed that breadstuffs had to be imported for the whole population. The Commission was therefore authorised to ship each month 54,000 tons of wheat to Belgium and 16,000 tons to Northern France. So far as the program for Northern France was concerned but few changes were made in Hoover's estimate. He had asked to be permitted to ship monthly 3,850 tons of bacon and lard, 4,400 tons of rice, and the quantities of the other articles already given in a table on pages 243-4. The Foreign Office announced that only 1,000 tons of bacon and lard and 2,200 tons of rice could be sent to Northern France; but so far as the other articles were concerned Mr. Hoover's estimate was accepted practically without change. For Belgium, however, very considerable changes were made. Hoover had based his estimate on the supposition that rations would be supplied to practically the whole population of Belgium; the Foreign Office, however, stipulated that only bread could be generally distributed, that the other articles imported by the Commission must be devoted exclusively to the feeding of the wholly or partially destitute. Hoover had asked for 10,500 tons of bacon and lard monthly; the figure prescribed by the Foreign Office was 2,400 tons. Hoover had asked also for a monthly importation of 5,000 tons of rice, 4,000 tons of beans and peas, and 20,000 tons of maize; the Foreign Office granted only 3,000 tons of beans and peas, made no provision for the importation of rice, and stipulated that only sufficient maize could be shipped to Belgium to provide 8,000 tons of maize meal to be used exclusively for human consumption. The only other articles permitted to be sent to Belgium were 500 tons of condensed milk and 250 tons of yeast materials. Hoover had asked to be permitted to send 1,000 tons of condensed milk, 2,000 tons of sugar, 2,000 tons of coffee, 1,000 tons of soap, 1,000 tons of cocoa, 1,500 tons of preserved meat, and small quantities of other foodstuffs, but the Foreign Office refused permission to send any of these quantities into Belgium.

Reasons for the Reductions in the Program.—In a letter to Monsieur Paul Hymans, the Belgian Minister, on February 23, Sir Edward Grey explained the reasons which had led the Foreign Office to make the great reductions in the Belgian program of Mr. Hoover. He stated that no answer had been received from Germany to the demands of the letter of December 31, for effective guarantees for the protection of native foodstuffs and especially livestock; that under these circumstances, the only means by which the allied governments could ensure the reservation of the domestic produce of Belgium for the Belgian population seemed to be the restriction of imports to an amount corresponding to a fixed *per capita* ration. Since there was still a considerable amount of native food in Belgium which the well-to-do people could buy, His Majesty's Government had decided to forbid the Commission to import any food except flour or wheat for the whole population. After careful enquiries as to the needs of the destitute, it had been decided to permit such definite quantities of bacon and lard, beans and peas and maize to be shipped to Belgium as to provide a bare subsistence ration for the 3,250,000 persons who were roughly estimated to be wholly or partially destitute.

**The necessity for more Effective Control in Belgium.**—Sir Edward Grey went on to state that he had impressed upon Mr. Hoover and the Commission the absolute necessity of taking measures to secure control of the native stocks. ‘I am conscious,’ he said, ‘that the reductions involved in the program now laid down will arouse apprehensions in the minds of your Government, and if they desire to offer any observations in the matter I shall be ready to give these due consideration. But I trust that you will lay before them the difficulties of the situation, the care and forethought necessary in dealing with an enemy whose sole object is to make use of the resources of Belgium for his own ends both now and in the future, and the supreme difficulty of providing the Commission with the shipping necessary for the continuance of its work.’

**The Method of enforcing the Program of Imports.**—The fixing of a definite program of monthly imports involved considerable difficulty for the Commission. The general situation in the world’s markets, and the shipping situation, made it almost impossible for the Commission to deliver the fixed quantities agreed upon each month. Temporary difficulties might arise that would greatly decrease the shipments in one month, while in the succeeding month the Commission might have considerable greater arrivals in Rotterdam than the quantities in the program of imports. Moreover, it was difficult in the case of the subsidiary cereals, such as rice, beans, peas and maize, to secure monthly the exact quantities of each called for by the program. Mr. Hoover, therefore, wrote the Foreign Office, on March 1, 1916, explaining these difficulties and asking for a certain latitude in making shipments to Belgium. He stated that he had noted that in the letter from the Foreign Office to the Belgian Minister the substitution of rice in place of maize had been authorised. Hoover therefore wrote that he was assuming that the subsidiary cereals could be substituted for one another as long as the total did not exceed 11,000 tons monthly. In regard to Northern France, Hoover stated that he assumed also that subsidiary cereals could be handled in the same way, provided the total of 6,050 tons was not exceeded. In regard to the monthly shipments, he explained that the arrivals in Rotterdam were very irregular, and that it was a waste of time and money to store stuff in Rotterdam. He said that a little latitude in this matter would be very helpful to the Commission, which, if permitted to import a little more than the program one month, would adjust it in the subsequent months.

Lord Eustace Percy replied to these propositions of Mr. Hoover on March 16, stating that the British Government had no objection to the substitution of one subsidiary cereal for another, provided the totals did not exceed the quantity authorised, that no more maize should be imported than the quantity authorised in the program, and that the only rice imported should be cleaned rice. He said that it was impossible to lay down a general rule in the matter of permitting the Commission latitude in arranging its shipments to Belgium. He said: ‘I do not think it is possible to lay down a rule on this point, and you should get our authority before exceeding your month’s program on any occasion. We certainly should not be able to allow you to exceed your month’s ration of bacon and lard, and I understand that you will not wish to do so, in any case, in view of the large stock that you have at Rotterdam already.’

**The difference between the Old Ration and the new Program.**—The members of the Commission, and especially Mr. Hoover, were much disappointed at the great reduction in the monthly shipping program dictated by the Foreign Office. Familiar as they were with the situation in Belgium, they realised clearly what great hardships this reduction

would inflict upon the people of Belgium. The Belgian Minister in London was no less exercised about the welfare of his compatriots, and wrote Mr. Hoover at the end of February asking for the effective difference between the imports previously made into Belgium and the program laid out by the Foreign Office. Hoover replied on March 2, giving the table reproduced below showing the comparative distribution to the 3,250,000 destitute under the new program and with the old ration.

	NEW RATION.		OLD RATION.	
	Total.	Per diem. Grammes.	Total.	Per diem. Grammes.
Flour ... ..	29,250	300	29,250	300
Maize ... ..	8,000 tons yield 4,000 tons human consumption.	40	20,000 tons yield 8,000 tons human consumption.	80
Rice ... ..	nil	nil	5,000	50
Peas and Beans ...	3,000	30	4,000	40
Bacon and Lard ...	2,400	{ 8 16	1,635 3,350	16.6 } 33.5 } = 50.1
		394		520

## COMPARATIVE VALUES.

	New Ration.	Old Ration.
Total grammes per diem ... ..	394	520
Total protein ... ..	49.1	59.2
Total fats ... ..	39.5	56.5
Total carbo-hydrates ... ..	256.1	328
Total calorific value ... ..	1,552	1,865

Hoover explained also that the nominal minimum necessary to keep the population in health should be 2,500 calories, that consequently it would be necessary to supply to the destitute a sufficient ration of native products, such as potatoes and vegetables, to bring up the ration to the minimum essential. The conditions in Belgium, however, were such that it was very doubtful if very much could be obtained in Belgium to supplement the ration of the poorer classes.

The principal difference between the new program and the old lay in fodder and fat imports. Hoover said it appeared to him that the Foreign Office note was based on the assumption that the negotiations in progress with the Germans for the effective protection of cattle and native foods generally would not succeed, for, if they did succeed, there would surely be no reasons for putting restrictions on the import of any foodstuffs into Belgium so long as they were actually and advantageously consumed by the civil population. Hoover explained that in order to provide the minimum subsistence ration to the Belgian poor population it would be necessary to have an increase of 5,000 tons a month in the Foreign Office program to include rice, which had been eliminated, and a smaller increase of 1,600 tons per month of bacon and lard to permit a ration of 40 grammes of fats per day instead of 24 grammes provided in the new ration and the 50 grammes in the old.

**Negotiations to secure Increases in the Program.**—The Belgian Minister immediately made representations to the English Government along the lines suggested by Hoover and asked that some modifications be made in the program of imports drawn up by the Foreign Office. M. Hymans explained that he appreciated the difficulties of the situation and the necessity for His Majesty's Government to display foresight and prudence in its negotiations with an enemy who had ruined and ravaged Belgium and had endeavoured to extract every possible advantage from its domination over that country. He sincerely trusted that these negotiations would result satisfactorily, as the fate of Belgium depended upon it. But he pointed out that the consequences of a diplomatic breach, that would lead to the suppression of relief work, would be so grave and so deplorable that nothing should be neglected in the endeavour to reach an understanding. He pointed out also that, from a military standpoint, the feeding of the Belgians was a matter of ensuring the working population sufficient food to prevent them being driven by hunger to agree to work for the Germans. The population in Belgium, he said, had thus far opposed a splendid resistance to the invader and had allowed themselves neither to be demoralised nor led away. But if their food-supply were now to be cut off by the stoppage of the Commission's imports, the people in Belgium were sure to feel that their cause was lost and that they had been abandoned by their own Government and its allies. This political and moral aspect of the question was of such importance that he was sure that His Majesty's Government would show a British spirit of generosity in its attitude toward the feeding of the civil population in Belgium. In discussing the shipping program laid down by the British Government, M. Hymans pointed out that the fixing of the minimum necessary was a very delicate operation, calling for a very thorough knowledge of the situation in Belgium, and expressed doubt as to the exactitude of the calculations which served as a basis for the ration prescribed by the British Government to the Commission. The imports of the Commission had been less than one-third of the normal imports. The Comité National had asked for 130,000 tons per month. The Commission had up to that time imported only 95,000 tons monthly. Under the new program it would be permitted to import only 68,000 tons or approximately one-half of the quantity asked for by the Comité National. M. Hymans stated he had discussed the matter very fully both with Mr. Hoover and with M. Francqui and that their positive opinion was that the minimum quantities necessary were: of bacon and lard 4,000 tons monthly; of maize 20,000 tons monthly; and of rice 5,000 tons monthly, in addition to the quantities of subsidiary cereals already provided for. If the new rations were enforced, fresh and keener hardships would be inflicted upon the people of Belgium. In his judgment, the allies' policy should be dictated by high moral considerations. It was necessary for Belgium to survive for the sake of Europe as well as for herself, and in order that she might survive it was necessary that her population should be provided with the means of subsistence.

As a result of the urgent representations made by the Commission, by M. Francqui, by the Marquis de Villalobar and by the Belgian Minister, the British Government agreed to reconsider certain items of their program as soon as the Germans had given the definite guarantees provided for in the demands made on December 31 by the Foreign Office. Before going on to deal with the increases permitted in the program of imports, it will therefore be necessary to first review the negotiations carried on in the spring of 1916 to secure new guarantees for the protection of native foodstuffs and livestock of Belgium.

NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE GERMANS TO SECURE COMPLIANCE WITH THE  
BRITISH DEMANDS, DECEMBER 1915 TO APRIL 1916

**The Germans Attempt to negotiate a Compromise.**—The letter addressed by Sir Edward Grey to Ambassador Page on December 31 was submitted, through the patron Ministers in Brussels, to the Governor-General. The Germans were at first tremendously indignant at what they considered the impudence of the British Foreign Office in making new demands as a condition for the continuance of the relief work in Belgium. The Commission in Belgium had come, however, as a result of the organisation of the *Vermittlungsstelle*, into much closer contact with the General Government and especially with Baron von der Lancken, head of the political department. Mr. Hoover and Mr. Poland, the director in Belgium, were therefore able to communicate more directly and to state more emphatically their views of the situation. At first the German authorities declared that they would live up to the guarantees they had already given in the matter of native foods, but that nothing more should be asked of them. They finally became convinced by the representations made by the Commission that the British Government would insist upon having its demands complied with, and in a more conciliatory tone began to suggest possible compromises. On January 24, Francqui wrote to Hoover that the German authorities were examining the possibility of giving satisfaction to the British demands by forbidding the exportation from Belgium of all foodstuffs.

After repeated discussion in Brussels, the Germans proposed a compromise solution of the native food problem. This was embodied in a letter sent by von der Lancken in February to the patron Ministers in Brussels. He wrote that he had communicated to the Governor-General the note sent by the Ministers on January 23 stating the British demands. He said that the Governor-General had expressed the desire to avoid in the future certain errors that had been committed by zealous agents, probably ignorant of the intentions and orders of the Governor-General; that in consequence, and in order to clear up the situation, the Governor-General had declared his willingness to prohibit the exportation from the territory of the General Government of all foodstuffs, including cattle, and also fertilizers and seeds. This prohibition would have the proviso, however, that certain products of the Belgian soil, chiefly articles of luxury produced in quantities largely exceeding the local consumption in Belgium, should continue to be exported. The Governor-General also reserved to himself the right to utilise the stocks of Belgium for the feeding of the occupying army in proportion to the resources of the country. The Governor-General expressed his willingness to protect from military requisition all clothing and raw material for the manufacture of clothing to be imported by the *Comité National*. He was willing to grant to the Ministers all control that was necessary, and would facilitate the carrying out of all measures which the patron Ministers deemed essential in the administration of this control. 'The Governor-General is convinced that in giving these new assurances he has done everything possible in the interest of the Belgian civil population. The proposed convention must, however, be based upon the condition that the patron Ministers give to the Governor-General, in the name of the Governments which they represent, the assurances that England will not hinder the provisionment of Belgium with products destined for human consumption and animal consumption for the whole duration of the German occupation and to an extent to be determined by the *Comité National*. To this end it is especially necessary that England give an engagement to no longer requisition

the ships chartered by the Commission for Relief in Belgium. The Governor-General insists the more upon this indispensable condition, since a crisis in the importation of foodstuffs would gravely endanger the vital interests of the Belgian population, the safeguarding of which interests has decided the Governor-General to grant the above stated guarantees.'

**The Mission of the Comité National to London.**—In order to more effectively present the case of Belgium and to attempt to persuade the English to accept the guarantee offered by von Bissing, the Comité National decided to send a special mission to London. M. Franquai and the Baron Lambert were commissioned by the Comité National to represent it, and the Marquis de Villalobar, the Spanish Minister, accompanied them in order to explain to the British Government his understanding of the diplomatic situation. On February 21 this mission arrived in London from Brussels with the German reply to the demands made by the British Government on December 31. On the following day M. Franquai called on Hoover and informed him that they proposed to deliver the dispatch to Sir Edward Grey. Hoover suggested that the matter should be sent in accord with diplomatic practice in the usual way through the American and Spanish Ambassadors in London, but Franquai said that the Marquis was very anxious to present the matter himself and would no doubt arrange this with the American Ambassador. The co-operation of Mr. Hoover was not invited. On the same evening Hoover called on the Marquis de Villalobar and discussed the situation with him. Hoover explained to the Marquis the attitude of the English toward the relief and made certain suggestions as to the methods of procedure.

It was rather a curious commentary on the attitude of M. Franquai toward Mr. Hoover and the Commission at this time that Hoover was not invited to assist in the negotiations of the mission with the British Government. It seems to have been the purpose of this mission from Brussels to attempt not only to secure the acceptance of the German guarantees but also to obtain from the British Government a recognition of the Comité National as the chief relief agency. This matter will be referred to later in the chapter dealing with the disagreement that arose between the Commission and the Comité National toward the end of 1916. The whole purpose of this mission, according to the Marquis de Villalobar, was to explain to important people in the allied governments the political significance of the Comité National as a government within a government working in Belgium to maintain the morale of the Belgian people and to prevent the people from taking employment from the Germans.

**The Foreign Office makes the position clear.**—On February 25 the mission called on Sir Edward Grey and presented the German note, together with other matters which were on their minds. Sir Edward Grey promised to consider the German note and to state his views on the German proposals, but later on expressed his surprise that the Commission was not represented at the meeting. On the same afternoon the Spanish and American Ambassadors in London called on Sir Edward Grey to present a letter drawn up by Hoover and his American associates on the Commission, stating that the Commission felt strongly that the time had come for it to retire from the relief work and to turn over the whole burden to the Comité National. Sir Edward Grey, greatly surprised at this development of affairs, told the Ambassadors that this was wholly impossible, that the Commission would have to remain in sole control of the whole relief work or he would have it suppressed immediately. On February 28 the Foreign Office wrote the Marquis de Villalobar stating that they must insist upon the demands made in December, as there were matters of principles at stake

on which the British Government would accept no compromise. He stated clearly, also, that Mr. Hoover was the only person directly and personally responsible for the whole of the relief work and that the British Government looked to the Commission to supervise the guarantees in Belgium, and could not, in this matter, accept the assurances either of the patron Ministers or of the Comité National.

The discussions in London continued until the latter part of March. On the 18th of that month the Marquis de Villalobar wrote Lord Eustace Percy that he had received further communications from Brussels, and thought that if the British would accept certain modifications in their demands he could secure the adherence of the German authorities to the proposed agreement. He stated the Germans were willing to undertake that food-stuffs should not be requisitioned or purchased in Belgium for the use of the occupying army, provided that the individual soldiers should be allowed to make purchases in the open markets.

**The Concessions made by the Foreign Office.**—Replying to this letter on March 31, Lord Robert Cecil stated that if the German authorities would yield to the demands made by the British Foreign Office on December 31, 1915, and repeated in the memorandum to Villalobar on February 28, 1916, the British Government were prepared to agree that :

1. The incidental purchase by individual soldiers of Belgian native produce shall not be regarded as a breach of the undertaking, provided that the quartermaster's department is definitely instructed not to, and in fact does not, purchase any such native produce, and provided that such individual purchases are not in any way systematic and do not in fact come in any way within the purview or control of the quartermaster's department or other military authority.

2. The question of the export of Belgian chicory or other vegetables, of which there is an admitted surplus, may be left for subsequent separate consideration on its merits.

It was provided also that the question of export of articles of clothing and raw material from Belgium should be left for future consideration, but with the proviso that the Commission would not be permitted to make further importations of clothing until the demands of the British Government were complied with in so far as the non-requisition of Belgian cloth was concerned. This prohibition of the importation of cloth had been made by the Foreign Office in March, and communicated by Lord Eustace Percy to Mr. Hoover on the 14th of that month, with a statement that this action had been compelled by the fact that the General Government in Belgium had ordered the seizure of all raw and manufactured wool.

**Further Negotiations with the Germans.**—Upon the return of M. Francqui, the Baron Lambert and the Marquis de Villalobar, negotiations were continued with the German authorities. General von Bissing finally agreed to accept the conditions imposed by the British and to give the necessary guarantees ; but before undertaking a step of such importance he had to consult with the Imperial Government in Berlin and with the Emperor, who was at that time at his headquarters at Charleville. The Baron von der Lancken went to Berlin to take up the matter, and von Bissing himself had an interview with the Emperor before giving any assurances.

On April 6 the patron Ministers were advised that they could make officially the request for the new guarantees, as von Bissing had been provided with the necessary power to issue the decrees involved.

**The nature of Guarantees and the functions of the Commission.**—A curious question,

which illustrates very well the difficulties of the Commission, arose when von Bissing came to draw up the guarantees which were to be given in return for the definite assurances from the British Government that the Commission's work would not be interfered with. What was the form in which these guarantees should be made? The proposed agreement was in reality a sort of diplomatic convention and involved a kind of contract between England and Germany; but, as diplomatic relations between the Governments of Great Britain and Germany no longer existed, such a convention had to be concluded indirectly. The Marquis de Villalobar suggested that the Germans should make an engagement, not with Great Britain, but with the neutral powers, and that these in their turn should secure the counter assurances from the British Government. As the neutral governments, however, could not be considered as accepting obligations as a result of guarantees given by the Germans in Belgium, the Commission was the only agency through which such a convention could be concluded. It was therefore decided that the guarantees should be given to the neutral Ministers, in their capacity as honorary chairmen and patrons of the Commission. The guarantee as finally adopted was drawn up in the form of a letter from von der Lancken to the patron Ministers, dated April 14, 1916.

**The Terms of the April Guarantees.**—In this it was stated that the Governor-General 'has noted with much pleasure that the steps taken by the neutral Ministers have been successful in persuading the English Government not to stop the ravitaillement of Belgium. His Excellency is the more satisfied with this result because the new demands recently formulated by the British Government, which constituted a serious menace to the continuation of this ravitaillement, were based on erroneous information to the effect that the authorities in the territory administered by the Governor-General had not respected the promises made by his Excellency to the neutral powers.' Von der Lancken stated that the Governor-General was prepared to agree to the demands of the English Government, and that he had in fact already partially complied with these by a decree of March 1 forbidding the exportation of foodstuffs and fodder. He would now supplement and complete the measures already formulated in this direction by new instructions forbidding the exportation from the territory of the General Government of foodstuffs, including animals, and all produce and fodder serving for human or animal food; he would forbid also the exportation from the said territory of seeds, fertilizers and agricultural supplies. It was provided that stocks owned by the military authorities in Belgium, at the time of the issuance of the order, could be removed by the army, but instructions would be given immediately to the military commissariat of the General Government forbidding the requisition or purchase in the occupied territory of Belgium of any of the products mentioned for the needs of the army of occupation. This prohibition was not, however, to apply to occasional purchases by individual soldiers. 'Having thus extended the scope of the obligations entered into by him previously toward the three neutral powers, for the territory which he governs, the Governor-General is persuaded that on its side the Government which your Excellency represents will assume toward him the guarantee that the British Government will henceforward definitely renounce the practice of interfering, by requisitioning ships or by any other means, with the ravitaillement of the civil population in Belgium.' The Governor-General gave the assurance that this agreement would be conscientiously observed by the authorities and troops under the orders of the General Government, and declared that the neutral Ministers would be allowed to assure themselves, in any way that they deemed necessary, that the guarantees were observed.



**The Decree of April 22, 1916.**—The guarantees contained in this letter of von der Lancken were put into effect by a decree of General von Bissing, issued on April 22, in which all exportations of foodstuffs from the territory of the General Government was forbidden, except in the case of the surplus of certain native products such as fresh vegetables, fruits and chicory, which were produced in excess of the needs of the population. It was provided that the Commission could make exportations of excess Belgian products to Northern France for the use of the civil population there. In this decree the foreigners under von Bissing's command were forbidden to purchase native supplies for the army commissariats, although the individual soldiers were allowed to continue to make individual purchases.

These promises of von Bissing marked the end of the long series of negotiations which had been undertaken by the Commission to secure the protection of Belgian native products. If these 'April guarantees' had been strictly adhered to by the German authorities, it would have been practically impossible for any of the Belgian food-products to have gone to Germany or to the German army. But, of course, in view of the situation which prevailed in Belgium, the German authorities did not make any great effort to enforce these April guarantees, except when the neutral Ministers made such vigorous demands that it became necessary for the Governor-General to at least attempt to satisfy them. The clandestine trade in foodstuffs between Belgium and Germany still continued, so also did the purchases for the German army canteens in France; but in spite of these violations of the spirit of the guarantees, the activities of the department of inspection and control and the efforts of the neutral Ministers made it possible to put an end to the greater part of the leakage of Belgian foodstuffs to Germany and to the German army. The Commission therefore could well consider that it had gained a great and a real triumph in securing these guarantees.

#### INCREASED IMPORTS PERMITTED BY THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT

**The British Government decide to permit Increased Imports.**—As a result of the representations made to the British Government in March by the Commission, the Comité National and the Marquis de Villalobar, the Foreign Office had agreed to reconsider the import program imposed in the letter of February 23, provided the Germans would give the guarantees required to protect native foodstuffs. As soon as word came from Belgium that the Germans were on the point of acceding to the revised demands of the British in regard to the non-export of food-products from Belgium, the British Government at once began to consider the increase in the program requested by the Commission.

**Hoover makes New Representations.**—Mr. Hoover, on returning from Belgium at the beginning of April, wrote once more to Lord Eustace Percy, strongly urging the immediate necessity of permitting increases in the importations. He said that he had had discussions with all the American representatives in Belgium, as well as with the Belgian committees, and that, after a thorough canvass of the situation, he earnestly recommended that the import program of February 23 should be amended and that the Commission should be permitted to import 4,000 tons of bacon and lard a month, instead of 2,400 tons, and should be permitted to make a monthly importation of 5,000 tons of rice, for which no provision had been made in the February program. In order to facilitate the work of the Commission, he strongly urged that all cereals, i.e. peas, beans, maize and rice, should be made

interchangeable, as it was quite impossible to arrange to ship to Belgium each month the definite and precise quantities of individual cereals permitted. Some months larger or smaller quantities of one or the other of these cereals would be available, and it was essential, in view of the food shortage in Northern France, that the people should have the benefit of the full quantities permitted by the British program. Hoover pointed out that all these commodities were being used only in families holding a *carte de menage* (household ration card), which was issued only to those families which were either destitute or of very limited means. He said that the number of these *cartes de menage* had gradually increased during January and February; that in order to reduce the number of consumers to meet the food shortage, occasioned by the British limitation of imports of February 23, the old cards had been called in and a new set issued; but, in spite of all restrictions on the issuance of cards, a little over 5,000,000 had to be distributed. As the ration in the program imposed by the British had provided only for the supply to 3,250,000 partially or wholly destitute, the increase proposed above would be necessary in order to supply the agreed ration to the 5,000,000 people who were now in the category of partially or wholly destitute. Hoover pointed out with particular emphasis that the reduction in the quantity of native food-supplies was having the effect of producing acute suffering, especially in the industrial centres, and that it was simply impossible for the Commission, in view of the situation, to increase the number of ration cards.

In the same letter Mr. Hoover also made the request for permission to send monthly 1,000 tons of yeast materials into Belgium, as this was absolutely necessary to bake the actual amount of bread for which the Commission imported wheat.

**Increases in the Program fixed by the Foreign Office.**—The Foreign Office recognised the justice of Mr. Hoover's representations, and, in a letter of April 11, the Commission was notified by Lord Robert Cecil that the British Government had decided, 'in view of the considerations urged in your letter, to agree to the increase for which you ask, viz., 3,300 tons of flour, 1,600 tons of bacon and lard, and 2,200 tons of rice per month. His Majesty's Government further agrees that all cereals shall be made interchangeable including wheat.'

This increase in the flour ration was provided for Northern France, while the other increases were for Belgium. In view of the practically complete absence of native food-stuffs in France, the Commission had considered it necessary to increase the ration by 50 grammes per day *per capita* and this 3,300 tons increase in the flour importation was required to provide for this increase in the ration.

The total of the subsidiary cereals now permitted to be imported each month was 13,200 tons for Belgium and 6,050 tons for France, or a total of 19,250 tons. In a letter of April 19 the Foreign Office notified Mr. Hoover that no objection would be raised to the average monthly delivery at Rotterdam of 12,000 tons of rice, provided that the Commission's simultaneous delivery of maize, beans and peas did not exceed 7,250 tons a month.

Mr. Hoover had made the request that the import of this quantity of rice should be permitted, because of the great difficulty of securing beans and peas, which had practically disappeared from the world's market. It was possible still to secure ample rice, and he therefore proposed to introduce rice into Belgium whenever it was impossible to supply the beans, peas and maize called for by the import program.

**The Official British acknowledgment of the 'April Guarantees.'**—The official acknowledgment by the British Government of the April guarantees of von Bissing was

made in a letter transmitted by the Foreign Office to the American and Spanish Ambassadors on May 6, 1916. With this letter was sent a memorandum stating the views of the British Government on the guarantees offered by von der Lancken in his letter of April 14 to the Ministers in Belgium. In this memorandum it was stated: 'His Majesty's Government note with satisfaction that the Governor-General in Belgium undertakes to prohibit the export from the territory within its jurisdiction of all the foodstuffs and fodderstuffs, including seeds, fertilizers and agricultural stock of all kinds, the only exception being: (1) that the export of stocks of the above commodities of German origin may be allowed; (2) that the Commission for Relief in Belgium will be permitted to export to Northern France such food, cattle and fodder as constitute an excess over the internal consumption in Belgium; and (3) that certain native Belgian products of which there is an admitted surplus may, on the basis of the letter addressed to the Marquis de Villalobar of March 24 last, be exported from Belgium.'

The memorandum went on to state that, in regard to these surpluses which could be exported from Belgium, the British must stipulate that the Commission should be allowed to exercise such control over the Belgian stocks as to make sure that they would be conserved for the future and would be made available for the needs of the population. In the matter of the purchase of food in Belgium by individual soldiers, it was stated that in return for the assurance that there would be no requisitions of foodstuffs in Belgium for the use of the occupying army, 'His Majesty's Government now agree to raise no objection to the incidental purchase by individual soldiers of Belgian native produce, provided that such individual purchases are not in any way systematic and do not in fact come in any way within the purview or control of the quartermaster's department or any other military authority.'

The British assurances of aid to the Commission.—The Foreign Office, in this memorandum, also took objection to the passage in von der Lancken's letter in which the American Government was requested to obtain a guarantee that the British Government would henceforward abstain from impeding, by the requisition of ships or in any other way, the provisionment of the civil population of Belgium. It was stated 'that His Majesty's Government must in the first instance emphatically deny that they have ever taken any measures for impeding the provisionment of the Belgian population within the limits to which they have agreed; they have always been desirous of co-operating in the most open and cordial manner with the Commission for Relief in Belgium, in whose operations they repose complete reliance; and, though they have been obliged at certain times to requisition British ships which the Commission for Relief in Belgium desired to employ, this has been done to meet the urgent necessities of the moment and to ease some temporary shortage of freight, for the existence of which they cannot be held responsible. . . . Subject to this reservation, the Commission may count on continuing to receive in the future, as they have received in the past, the loyal co-operation and assistance of His Majesty's Government in the great humanitarian work which they have undertaken, and it is hoped that the considerations which may have inspired the requirement of the German authorities in regard to requisitioning of ships will be favourably affected by the negotiations at present in progress for the use by the Relief Commission of German interned vessels.

'The Belgian Minister at this Court and the Commission for Relief in Belgium have recently placed before me extensive proposals for an increase in the present rations. After a careful examination of these proposals, and acting on the assumption that the

undertakings given by the Governor-General in Belgium will be rapidly carried into effect, His Majesty's Government have decided to increase the rations in the sense desired by the Commission. It will, of course, be understood that the continuance of the rations on the high scale must be dependent on the exercise of a control over native Belgian produce on the lines indicated above.'

**The Official Confirmation of the Increases in the Import Program.**—Immediately after this letter was received, the Commission was officially notified by the Foreign Office that the requests made by Mr. Hoover in his letter of April 5 would be granted. Sir Edward Grey announced on May 10 that after a full consideration of the matter the British Government had agreed that the Commission could import 4,000 tons of bacon and lard per month (instead of 2,400 tons), 5,000 tons of rice (for which there was no previous allowance), and 1,000 tons of yeast materials (instead of 250 tons). It was further agreed that the Commission could make all cereals interchangeable, provided the actual imports of maize did not exceed 8,000 tons per month and provided also that the Foreign Office was notified of all substitutions made.

**The Question of the Importation of Clothing.**—In regard to the importation of clothing, there was a further interchange of letters between Mr. Hoover and the Foreign Office. It will be remembered that on March 14 Lord Eustace Percy had notified Mr. Hoover that, in view of the requisitions by the Germans of stocks of cloth in Belgium, the Commission would not be allowed until further notice to ship any clothing into Belgium. Once the agreement in regard to Belgian native produce was made, Mr. Hoover immediately asked the Foreign Office for permission to send into Belgium clothing already purchased, *en route*, or in stock at Rotterdam. In a letter of May 28 to Lord Eustace Percy he stated that the Commission had approximately 1,300 tons at Rotterdam, 1,300 tons in England, and 1,000 tons in transit. He stated also that this clothing was either bought with gift money or directly donated to the Commission, and was destined entirely for the absolutely destitute in Belgium and Northern France and would not therefore become the basis of commercial operations of any sort. Further, he pointed out that the central clothing warehouses in Belgium would be entirely emptied by the end of June; that it had already been necessary to withdraw work from over 30,000 employees of the clothing workshops throughout Belgium; and that unless the quantities of clothing mentioned could be sent into Belgium, it would mean that many thousands more would be thrown out of employment and the amount of destitution in Belgium would be thus increased by just so much.

Lord Eustace Percy, replying on June 14, stated that the Foreign Office had decided that the Commission could import into Belgium the stocks of clothing mentioned in the letter of Mr. Hoover.

On the same date Sir Edward Grey made the same announcement to the American and Spanish Ambassadors in London. He pointed out, however, that the Germans had refused to make any guarantees for the stocks of clothing in Belgium, and that consequently 'if it were not that special considerations arise in regard to stocks of clothing already collected by the Commission, I should have been obliged to make permanent the embargo on these stocks, but I cannot forget that they are the product of appeals for contributions of this kind made by the Relief Commission in the United States last autumn, and His Majesty's Government are most reluctant to defeat the charitable endeavours of the American public who answered these appeals. I have therefore informed the Commission that His Majesty's Government raise no objection to the importation into Belgium of certain stocks

of clothing already in their possession in Rotterdam, in England and in the United States to be distributed under the strict system of control guaranteed by the Commission ; but, in view of the German seizures above mentioned, no further authorisation of this kind can be given. From now until the end of the war the allied governments must impose an absolute prohibition on the importation into Belgium by the Relief Commission of clothing or clothing materials of any kind, unless and until the German Government reverse their recent policy and restore to the people of Belgium the stocks of such materials which they have taken from them.'

**The Commission extends its Control over the Distribution of Clothing.**—To meet the demands of the Foreign Office the Commission at this time appointed one of the American delegates in Belgium, Mr. Milton M. Brown, to be the Commission's representative for the clothing department in Belgium and at the same time prepared to make effective a complete control over all clothing imported by the Commission. In spite of the declaration of Sir Edward Grey, in his letter of June 13, that no further importations would be permitted, the Commission did not give up hope of being able to import during the fall of 1916 sufficient clothing for the destitute in Belgium and Northern France for the winter. As a matter of fact, in later negotiations, the Foreign Office finally permitted the Commission to make further imports of clothing.

**The importance of the Concessions gained by the Commission.**—Thus, by the middle of June 1916, the Commission had cleared away from its path some of the most important of the obstacles which had been impeding its efforts for nearly two years, and if further difficulties had not arisen it would have been able to have made its plans and carried through its program for the third winter of work without many difficulties. But, as always, one difficulty hardly disappeared from the Commission's path until another even more serious one arose. So it was in this case. The Commission had not only to secure the guarantees from the Germans for the protection of imported and native food in Belgium, but had also to make sure that these guarantees were enforced. The system of controlling food distribution and supervising the guarantees used during the first year had hardly been a system at all, and the inevitable result was that a considerable amount of fraud had developed and some violations of the agreements had occurred. It therefore became necessary for the Commission, in the course of the year 1916, to systematise its organisation and discharge more effectively its responsibilities in the inspection and control of the relief operations and of the observance of the guarantees in Belgium.

## CHAPTER XI

## THE DEPARTMENT OF INSPECTION AND CONTROL

EARLY EFFORTS TO PROVIDE FOR THE INSPECTION AND CONTROL OF  
FOOD DISTRIBUTION

The American Delegates' efforts to control Food Distribution.—From the very beginning of food distribution in Belgium, the necessity for some efficient control of the operations of local committees had been felt. The absence of ordinary facilities of communication and the complexity of the relief work made it very necessary that the work should be thoroughly supervised by the Commission, the Comité National and the provincial committees. The American delegates in most of the provinces had attempted to work out for themselves some sort of control of the operation of the Belgian committees. They were constantly going about and making inspections of local and regional committees and food dépôts ; but it was practically impossible for them personally, without an extensive staff, to supervise the distribution in the hundreds of communes in the provinces to which they were assigned. Their efforts to organise a personal staff to effectively inspect and control the work had been discouraged by the Comité National and the Brussels office of the Commission. They were instructed that they were not expected to assume any executive functions nor to carry out themselves the provisions drawn up by the Comité National and the Commission. The comité exécutif of the Comité National and the directors of the Commission at Brussels felt that the detailed work of distributing the food and controlling the distribution should be done by the Belgian committees themselves. But for various reasons the provincial committees acted very slowly or not at all in providing for the supervision of distribution. The local committees were allowed so much independence of action that abuses naturally soon developed. The regulations of the Comité National were misinterpreted, wrongly applied or deliberately disregarded. The partisan nature of Belgian politics contributed to the developments of abuses. Local committees in some cases used their positions to favour their political or religious associates. In many places the regulations as to rations were never heeded and the local committees distributed the supplies as they pleased. The local committees were often made up of men of local prominence and of influential politicians. The regional committees, with their membership drawn from the localities over which they were supposed to exercise control, often were unwilling to bring pressure to bear on the communal committees. The American delegates urgently insisted that some more effective method of control should be established. Pressure was repeatedly brought to bear on the Comité National to provide for the enforcement of the regulations.

Instructions from the Comité National to Local Committees.—At the very beginning of this work the Comité National had issued a complete set of instructions to the provincial committees as to the methods and principles to be applied in the work of relief. These had been supplemented later at frequent intervals by new instructions. The result was that the instructions had grown to be very complex and sometimes contradictory, and often the local committees were quite unable, in spite of their best intentions, to find out

definitely how they should carry on the work. For the first four months of the work these local committees were practically left alone, save for sporadic visits of the American delegate or the members of the provincial committees. The Comité National, on being acquainted with the unsatisfactory conditions in many localities, decided to insist on the creation by the provincial committees of some sort of control over the local bodies.

At the weekly meeting of the Comité National on February 25, 1915, Francqui called the attention of the provincial committees to the necessity of exercising a strict control over the operations of the regional and local committees. On March 4, Francqui again brought the matter to the attention of the provincial committees. He described the measures that had been devised by the committee of the arrondissement of Charleroi to provide for the control of the distribution of relief funds. A special committee of control had been organised to verify the operation of local committees, to inspect their accounts and to see that they followed the instructions given by the Comité National, the provincial committee or the regional committees. The members of this committee of control, two delegates for each canton, visited periodically groups of communes to make such investigations as were necessary. Francqui said that he recognised that such an organisation would be difficult to establish over the whole country, but insisted that it was indispensable that very serious measures be taken in all provinces to provide effective control of local committees. He asked that the provincial committees take action immediately and inform the Comité National of the measures adopted.

**Difficulties with the Local Committees.**—A question asked by one of the members of the Comité National illustrated very well the general situation. M. van Hoegaerden, president of the provincial committee of Liège, asked if the instructions of the Comité National were intended to be enforced in detail upon the local committees; he made this enquiry, he explained, because he had had difficulties with one of his regional committees which had refused to apply the regulations of the Comité National. Francqui answered that the Comité National obviously intended that these instructions should be most strictly observed in the provinces and that the provincial committees would be required to see that they were observed; that discussions in local committees as to whether they should heed instructions from the Comité National were superfluous and inopportune and could not be permitted.

On March 11 Francqui announced in the meeting of the Comité National that information had been received that benevolent funds allotted to several communes had not been transmitted by the provincial committees; that these funds should be sent to the communes without delay; that the provision account ought to be kept quite separate and the benevolent funds of several communes ought not to be detained because the communes had failed to pay the balances they owed on the provision account. M. van Hoegaerden stated, in explanation of the action of certain of the provincial committees, that the funds had not been sent to the communes because it was feared that they would not use the money for the purposes described. Francqui insisted again that the provincial committees ought to exercise such a control over the communes that irregularities of this sort could not occur.

**The Organisation of the Committees of Control and Inspection.**—At the Comité National meeting on March 18, Janssens, who was presiding in the absence of Francqui, stated that the system of control committees devised at Charleroi had been extended also to the arrondissement of Mons and Ath, and insisted that the provincial committees everywhere should provide for the inspection of sub-committees in some similar way. He said

it was now doubly necessary to force the local committees to comply with the instructions of the Comité National as to impartiality in distribution, and to correct the errors or mistakes in organisation and in the application of instructions. The inspectors should be charged with explaining fully to the local committees the manner in which their work should be done. A system of inspectors would in this way have the happiest influence on the operations of the sub-committees. At this meeting it was announced also by members of the provincial committee that services of inspection had been installed in the provinces of Liège, Namur and East Flanders.

A question of inspection and control did not come up again until the meeting of the Comité National on April 29. At that time Francqui stated that the examination of the reports of the provincial committees on the methods adopted for controlling local committees had given him the impression that the instructions given on March 4 and 18 had not been fully understood ; that the control ought to consist, not only of the inspection of the account books and dépôts, but also in the verification of the methods of distributing food and benevolent funds ; that this control ought also to ensure the enforcement in the communes of the instructions of the Comité National and to effect impartiality in distribution. Such a mission, he said, could not be fulfilled by itinerant inspectors with only intermittent control. It was necessary to have a definite organisation of control with a permanent mission in each region. It was especially necessary, because of the attitude of the German authorities, to see that the instructions of the Comité National in regard to keeping a complete and absolute separation of the local committee and the communal administrations should be rigidly enforced. This point was elaborated in a letter of instructions to the provincial committees, read at the Comité National meeting on May 6, enjoining the provincial committees to ensure the maintenance of the private and neutral character of all committees and to ensure the impartiality of distribution.

**New attempts to provide Stricter Control in October 1915.**—The matter was occasionally referred to in later meetings of the Comité National. In October Mr. Hoover, in the course of a visit to Brussels, called the attention of the Comité National to the growing opposition in England to the work of Belgian relief, because of reports which had been received of leakage to the Germans of Commission's food and because of rumours of illicit trafficking. As a result, the Comité National insisted more strongly than ever in October and November 1915 that the provincial inspection services should be extended and improved in such a way as to eliminate the existing abuses. In nearly all the provinces some measures were taken, but these usually fell far short of accomplishing the results hoped for. When the general department of inspection and control began its work in February 1916, one of its first activities was to thoroughly investigate the already existing provincial inspection services. A convenient summary of the functioning of these services at that time is given by Mr. J. C. Green in his report on the work of the department of inspection and control.

Some machinery was found in nearly all the provinces for the systematic inspection of the operation of local committees, but comparative efficiency was found in only a few of the provincial organisations. The heads of the general departments of inspection and control found that the most efficient services of inspection and control were those worked out in the provinces of Antwerp, Hainaut and Greater Brussels.

**The Service of Inspection and Control in Antwerp, February 1916.**—The service in the province of Antwerp in February 1916 was probably the most thoroughly organised



and most efficient of the provincial attempts to inspect and control local operations. This service had been created by the provincial committees of Antwerp in October 1915 as a special section of the department of ravitaillement. It was divided into two departments, the section of administrative inspection and the section of special investigations. The whole service was under the direction of one of the ablest administrators of the provincial committee. The section of administrative inspection included services for the inspection of rural committees, of the local committees in the Antwerp municipal area, and of the bakeries in the same area, and included also the bureau of statistics of the provincial committee. Each of these services was carried out, under orders from the head of the service, by inspectors. There was a chief inspector for each of the three arrondissements of Antwerp, Turnhout and Malines. Under these were district inspectors, who were changed each month from one district to another. They made investigations to make sure that the local committees were properly organised and carried out the instructions of the Comité National. They verified the accounts, investigated the control of bakeries, noted any inequalities in distribution, and, in general, acted as advisers to the local administrators. All the inspectors attended at the office of the provincial committee every Saturday morning. The questionnaires filled out during the week were presented, reports were read and instructions were given for the coming week. In any municipal area the problems were of course different from those in the rural communities, and there were therefore special services of inspection to control the work in the city of Antwerp.

The service of special investigations was in a nature of a detective bureau and was devoted to the investigations of grave abuses. Investigations were made by an inspector, appointed by the provincial committee, and a police officer of the city of Antwerp. Any violations that were found to be of a grave nature were taken before the courts and the offenders prosecuted judicially.

**Inspection and Control in the Hainaut, February 1916.**—The Hainaut was the first province to establish a service of inspection of a thorough-going sort. As early as February 1915, controllers had been appointed by the provincial committees for each of the eleven regions into which the province was divided. Special committees of control were constituted to look after the inspection of local operations. The first controllers were appointed by the American delegate, with the approval of the regional committees, and were entrusted with enforcing uniform regulations. A set of forty instructions to communes was drawn up by the American delegate, Mr. Robinson Smith, and sent out to the communes, signed by the American delegate as well as by the provincial committee. The system of flour and bread distribution in the Hainaut was designed to secure effective control of the baking problem. Flour was baked by the local bakers under contracts with the communal committees. All the bread had to be turned back by the baker to the committee and was distributed by the committee to the population in the communal dépôts. Each family was allowed to have bread from its favourite baker or, if the family preferred, it could receive its flour ration and bake its own bread. This system obviated most of the abuses which developed in other provinces and made it much easier to secure an effective control of the bakeries.

The controllers visited the local committees periodically and filled out on each occasion printed blanks, giving the number of inhabitants, the quantity of flour received, the number of people producing their own grain for flour, and the details as to the system of bread distribution. A monthly recapitulation was made for each region based on the

reports of these controllers. During the first year the system of control lacked uniformity. There were no meetings of controllers at which the general situation was canvassed. The reports represented practically only the personal estimate of the controllers and very often the local committees paid but little attention to their observations. Often no reports were received from certain communes for periods of several months.

The American representative clearly recognised the inefficiency of the system and fought a courageous but losing campaign to secure greater efficiency in the operations of the local committees and to bring about a more effective control over them. He believed that the only way in which this could be done would be the establishment of an efficient inspection and control system, under the direction of the American representative. But, as has been explained already, the tendency during the first year of the Commission's work was to interfere as little as possible in the details of distribution and to make the American delegates more advisers than executives. It is quite possible that vigorous and decisive action on the part of the Commission and its provincial representatives would have prevented or remedied at the beginning the great number and variety of abuses that actually arose in the distribution of food throughout Belgium during the year 1915. However that may be, the fact remains that in the Hainaut, as well as in the other provinces, the need for more effective control over local operations became clearly apparent before the end of the year, and in November 1915 a thorough re-organisation of the control services was effected. The provincial committee, in agreement with the American representative, drew up a revised and considerably enlarged edition of the original forty instructions. The number of controllers was increased and the system of control was extended to the French district of Maubeuge, which previously had not been subjected to any regular control. Monthly meetings of the controllers were begun for the explanation of instructions and for the discussion of such questions about the service as arose from time to time. These meetings were presided over by the American delegate, who used all his influence to make the system of control effective. A questionnaire was drawn up, to be filled in by the controllers each time they inspected the operations of a local committee. These forms were returned to the American representative, who carefully studied and classified them. Every effort was made to oblige the regional committees to put an end to any irregularities reported.

**Inspection and Control in Greater Brussels.**—In Greater Brussels the work of inspection, like every other department of the relief work, differed more or less from the systems in the provinces. The control of the bread distribution required a complicated system of checks and a careful system of inspection to prevent abuses. The flour was delivered in weekly instalments to the bakers, the quantity each received depending upon the list of customers which he had registered. In order to check these lists a card index-catalogue of the population of Brussels was prepared in the central office. Every family was entered three times in this catalogue, in an alphabetical index, in an index arranged according to the bakers and in an index by street and number. The bakers' lists were carefully checked by a service of visiting inspectors, assisted by seventeen police officers detailed by the city administration to aid in the work. Any abuses discovered were promptly reported to the service of inspection; any cases of dishonesty on the part of the bakers led to their suspension from the list of those entitled to receive flour for a definite period, and in case of very serious or repeated offences the bakers were permanently struck off the list. The foodstuffs other than bread were distributed in well-organised communal dépôts which could easily be controlled. In January 1916 the service of inspection was

enlarged and extended so as to include the supervision of all food or subsidies granted by the committee. This service was placed under the joint direction of the president of the provincial committee and of the American delegate.

**Inspection and Control in the Province of Liège.**—In the province of Liège the service of inspection was divided into practically separate services for each of the four arrondissements. In the city of Liège a system of inspection, with a chief inspector, had been established as early as February 1915. The chief inspector, accompanied by the American delegate, went about the communes of the arrondissement of Liège investigating the operations of local committees and assisting in the process of creating the machinery necessary for proper distribution of the food. The number of inspectors were gradually increased and detailed questionnaires were soon put into use. The inspection of the distribution of flour and bread took up most of the attention of the service. A special service of investigations was also established for the purpose of enquiring into reported abuse. Breaches of law or of the committee regulations were reported to the judicial authorities for action. The other three arrondissements organised services of inspection similar to that in Liège itself, but they were not nearly so effective and were insufficient to accomplish the desired end. No provincial service of inspection existed until organised in the spring of 1916.

**Inspection and Control in the Province of Namur.**—In Namur the work of systematic inspection had not begun until November 1915, when revelations with regard to illicit traffic stimulated the provincial committee into action. A system of controllers had been established in March 1915, but they had been concerned almost together with checking up the books of the communal committees and looking after the distribution of relief funds. The direction of the system of inspection was at first in the hands of the American delegate and the delegate of the Comité National. An attempt was made to carry out the investigations as to the method of distribution of foodstuffs by the local committees by the use of the controllers who had been working in the secours department since March, but this arrangement was soon found to be unsatisfactory. Special inspectors were therefore appointed to correct population figures, stop illicit traffic and verify the local accounts. In the latter part of December the provincial committee decided to take over the work of inspection. This was made a special section of the provisioning department under the direction of one of the administrators of the provincial committee. Questionnaires were devised for the use of inspectors, and these, when filled in, were sent to the regional committees which were expected to correct abuses. Copies were also forwarded to the service of inspection at Namur, and in any cases where the regional committees failed to act the American delegate and the Belgian head of the inspection service would personally visit the local committees to remedy the faults. By the middle of February 1916 the number of inspectors had been increased to forty and the local committees were reported on at least once a month.

**The system of Control in the Luxembourg.**—In the province of Luxembourg the service of inspection was particularly necessary because of the existence of native products in considerable quantities and of the consequent development of illicit traffic in imported foods. The provincial committee had sent out five inspectors in April 1915, but they were chiefly concerned in inspecting the operations of the secours department of the communal committees. In November 1915, as a result of instructions from Brussels, the provincial committee reorganised its service of inspection. A controller was appointed in each of

the nineteen regions of the province. These controllers worked entirely under the direction of the regional committees, but copies of their reports were sent to the provincial committee, which had its office at Brussels, and to the American delegate in the province. The activities of the controllers were greatly limited, no questionnaires were used and the general results until February 1916 had not been very great. Some indications had been obtained that abuses existed, but little had been done to prevent these.

**The Organisation of Inspection and Control in the Limbourg.**—The American delegate in the province of Limbourg had at the beginning of the work attempted to set up a system of inspection and control by his own staff, and repeatedly urged the provincial committee to take over itself the control of local committees. In March 1915 fifteen inspectors were appointed by the provincial committee to visit the communes, but their work was practically restricted to the auditing of the communal books. Later on, sixteen special inspectors were appointed and attached to the various regions. They made reports on printed forms, which were sent to the central office of the provincial committee, but until the spring of 1916 no efficient executive machinery was established for remedying the irregularities reported, and the communes were to a great degree allowed to manage things as they pleased.

**Inspection and Control in Brabant and the Flanders.**—In the province of Brabant, as Mr. Green reported, the inefficiency of the service of inspection was particularly conspicuous. In December 1915 the service which had been organised to control the distribution of secours was instructed to take over also the control of food distribution. There was a general inspector for each of the three arrondissements and a controller for each of the 23 regions. The controllers reported to the regional committee, and copies of reports, made out in the form of a questionnaire, were sent to the provincial committee, but there was no real centralisation of the service, nor was there any provision for effective executive action in remedying abuses. The provincial committee had practically no definite detailed information as to the conditions in the province.

In the part of Belgium in the *etappe* (i.e. in East and West Flanders) the German restrictions as to circulation made any system of inspection impossible, but members of local committees made reports at regional meetings as to the situation in their own communes. The general department of inspection and control was never permitted to establish its service in the Flanders. There, as in Northern France, it was impossible to carry on a service of inspection and control similar to that in Belgium.

**The Unification of the Provincial Services.**—This, then, in a general way, was the situation in Belgium, as regards the control of food distribution, at the time that the general department of inspection and control began its work. As the heads of the departments, representing the Commission and the Comité National, went from province to province in February and March 1916 they outlined the plan of organisation which they had designed to serve as a model for the provincial service of inspection. The provinces were urged to bring their services into conformity with this model, in order to set up throughout Belgium a thoroughly compact, homogeneous and efficient system, giving every possible assurance of proper control for the imported foodstuffs. Within a comparatively short time the various provincial services had been unified and extended and were functioning in accordance with the plans drawn up by the general department of inspection and control.

## THE FORMATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF INSPECTION AND CONTROL.

The Comité National attempts to re-organise its System of Inspection and Control. While in Brussels in December 1915 Hoover had discussed with the members of the Commission and the Comité National the problem of making the organisation in Belgium water-tight so far as any leakage to Germany was concerned. He informed them of the difficulties the Commission had encountered in England, and insisted that immediate steps should be taken to organise an effective system of controlling the food distribution. In consequence the comité exécutif of the Comité National, which had already, in March, May, November and December 1915, made repeated efforts to induce the provincial committees to organise and perfect methods of inspection, decided to take new steps to ensure the functioning of a proper system of control. During the month of January 1916, inspectors had been sent out by the Comité National to visit the various provinces and to examine critically the services of inspection. At the same time the American representatives, whose previous efforts to perfect on their own initiative some system of control had met with discouragement and disappointment, redoubled their efforts to find the leakage in the system of distribution and to report to the director such irregularities as they might discover.

It was not possible, however, to remedy the defects of the organisation and to stop the gaps through which the food was leaking to Germany by scattered individual efforts. Mr. Hoover, who had always endeavoured to leave the details of the work of distribution in Belgium to the Comité National and its sub-committees, now decided that, in view of the new crisis, it would be necessary for the Commission, in order to assure the continuance of its work, to assume a more direct and active supervision of the operations of the Belgian committee. He therefore wrote, on January 24, both to the director of the Commission at Brussels and to the Comité National, giving an account of the crisis which had arisen, discussing the British complaints as to the inefficiency of the control of food, and insisting that, in view of the great gravity of the situation, immediate and sufficient action should be taken to remedy the conditions which had grown up in Belgium. He said that he felt that if the facts, or rather the supposed facts, that had been reported to the Foreign Office were to be made known to the British public, the popular clamour which would arise would oblige the British Government to suppress the relief work.

Francois, in a letter of February 5, addressed to the presidents of all provincial committees, explained the situation and called upon the provincial committees to take such effective measures as would ensure better control in the future of the work of local committees. He recalled his repeated exhortations to the provincial committees to organise effective services of inspection and control and brought them to task because they had, for reasons, neglected to do this. He also repeated Hoover's warning that the neglect to establish proper control had endangered the existence of the relief work.

The Commission's part in working out a new System of Control.—Mr. W. B. Poland, then director of the Commission in Brussels, went vigorously to work to arrange, in co-operation with the Comité National, for the establishment of a service of inspection and control throughout Belgium, under the joint supervision of the Commission and the Comité National.

He insisted that the Commission representatives in the provinces should personally supervise the work of the local groups of inspectors and that the Commission's responsibility

in the matter should be recognised. After considerable negotiations, made necessary by the unwillingness of some of the leading members of the comité exécutif of the Comité National to accept the direct intervention of the Commission in the detailed administration of food distribution, agreements were signed on February 23 which provided for the creation of a department of inspection and control under the joint direction of representatives of the Commission and the Comité National.

**The Agreements providing for the Joint Department of Inspection and Control.—**

These documents are printed in the Commission's Departmental Reports of 1918. They provided for the fusion of the existing services of inspection into one organisation. The determination of the two relief organisations to secure unity in action was announced. There would be representatives from each organisation who would jointly act as directors of the department of inspection and control. They were given instructions to supervise the whole of the operations of the relief organisations, to make investigations as to the observance of the guarantees by the German authorities, to report all violations discovered to the Commission, the Comité National and the patron Ministers, and to inaugurate plans to secure the efficiency of the services of inspection and control. The responsibilities undertaken by the two organisations were summed up in the first three paragraphs of the so-called 'Service Note' for the work of the department of inspection and control, which had been signed by Francqui and Poland. These were as follows:—

'The Commission for Relief in Belgium is required to certify that the goods imported by it are distributed to the civil population of Belgium and the North of France and that the general terms of the undertakings of the German and British authorities are carried out.

'For its part, the Comité National must take care that the distribution of food to the population is made in accordance with its instructions, which are inspired by the fundamental rules on which the imports of foodstuffs by the Commission for Relief in Belgium are based.

'Finally, the Commission for Relief in Belgium and the Comité National must both be assured that the foodstuffs imported are equitably distributed among the whole civil population. With this end in view, both Commissions must insist upon the strict observance of the resolutions agreed upon by common consent.'

This service note went on to state that the Commission had established a numerous staff throughout Belgium with responsible representatives in every province empowered to see that the regulations imposed by the Commission were rigorously observed. They were to see that any irregularities were rectified and were to call the attention of the central office in Brussels to any violations of the terms of the guarantees. It was stated also that the Comité National had installed a controlling service in each province to exercise a general supervision over the local committees. In addition to and supplementing the provincial controlling services, the Comité National had also inaugurated an independent general inspection service to supervise the provincial services and to make sure that the rules and instructions of the Comité National were fully observed.

In this service note it was provided that the organisation of the work of inspection and control would centralise in Brussels under the joint direction of an American representative of the Commission and a delegate of the comité exécutif of the Comité National. The services of the Commission and the Comité National were to be united. In the provinces the provincial service would be under the direction of a head of the provincial committee and a delegate of the Commission. The whole purpose of this service note was therefore

to provide for complete co-operation between the Commission and the Comité National in the control of food distribution.

**The organisation of the Department of Inspection and Control.**—Accompanying the service note was a memorandum upon the organisation of the department of inspection and control, summarising the regulations that were to be enforced. It was provided that in distribution the fixed rations should be strictly observed. In order to provide for the work of the department two special sections were created, i.e. the administrative survey department and the investigation department. Each was presided over by a general superintendent and each was provided with a large staff of inspectors. The administrative survey had as its functions the inspection of the operations of the provincial and local committees and the reporting of irregularities to the central office. A questionnaire was drawn up covering completely the subjects to be investigated. The administrative superintendents were required to send reports of their investigations to the Comité National and the Commission. When serious abuses came to light they were to be referred to Belgian courts. The work of the investigation department was to be the ferreting out of all the violations of regulations and of cases of illicit trafficking in imported foodstuffs. The investigation department was to have a large staff of agents in the provinces, chosen because of their special qualifications for making the necessary investigations. They were to make enquiries, shadow suspected persons and look after transport of goods. The service of investigation was to work in constant co-operation with the public prosecutors, who were authorised to seize all foodstuffs the origin of which was in question. The prosecutors were likewise to take criminal proceedings against persons engaged in illicit trafficking.

**Prosecutions for Illicit Trafficking in imported Food.**—The Germans had forbidden the Comité National and its subsidiary bodies to enforce punitive measures against local committees or individuals who had violated the regulations as to food distribution. Consequently, the only method of procedure that the Comité National possessed was to proceed against the culprits judicially. Acting on the advice of lawyers attached to the committees, the Comité National and the Commission decided to print upon all ration cards a declaration by which the holder of the card undertook to consume in his own household the provisions which he received. The Belgian courts decided that under these circumstances any resale of food by individuals to whom it had been issued constituted swindling, under the provisions of the Belgian law, and any person failing to live up to the declaration which he had signed on his household card was therefore liable to criminal prosecution.

**The Department begins Work.**—The general department of inspection and control went vigorously to work to perform the functions for which it was created. Offices were established at Brussels on February 21, 1916. The first activity of the chiefs of the service was to make a thorough investigation of the provincial inspection services already existing. The results of their investigations have been reported in the previous section. After a careful study of the methods of controlling the distribution of food in use in the provinces, a plan of organisation was worked out to serve as a model for the provincial services. The chief requirements are summarised by Mr. Green in his report under eight headings :

**Regulations for the Provincial Services.**—(1) There was to be a complete centralisation of the services within the province under the joint direction of a representative of the provincial committee and an American delegate. A chief inspector was to be appointed to administer the service under the orders of the two directors.

In order to have any effective supervision it was necessary to have controllers who

could not be influenced by the political or other considerations which were often very prominent in the action of regional committees. This was accomplished by the creation of a centralised service which could not be influenced by local considerations.

(2) It was provided that the number of controllers attached to the various regions should be large enough to make possible a thorough report on the situation of each commune at least once every month. These controllers could not be members of regional or local committees within the district assigned to them. It was strongly recommended that all inspectors and controllers should be regularly paid and should form a staff that would be appointed and dismissed by the heads of the service. It was also recommended that the inspectors of the distribution of relief funds should be kept completely distinct from the inspection of food distribution. In addition to the controllers attached to the regions, the provincial services were urged to have two or three general inspectors, endowed with great power, who could check the work of the local controllers.

(3) Because of the complexity and conflicting nature of the mass of regulations sent out by the Comité National and the provincial committees, the provincial services were strongly urged to codify the instructions to which the local committees were to be required to conform. The controllers were thus to act, in a measure, as expert advisers to interpret regulations to the communes. They were instructed on each visit to the commune to explain in detail the new regulations that might be drawn up from time to time by the higher committees. This was very necessary, as it was found when the service of inspection and control began its work that the improved regulations establishing a new policy of strict rationing of all imported foodstuffs were practically unknown in certain of the provinces, except in the offices of the provincial committee.

(4) The provincial services were required to use a detailed questionnaire to collect the desired information from the local committees. A system was to be devised by the provincial services to provide for the proper study and tabulation of the information collected by the controllers.

(5) General meetings of all the members of the provincial staffs in each province were to be held as often as possible, to unify the service in the province, to explain difficult regulations and to issue new instructions.

(6) The provincial services were instructed to organise a system of flour and bread control, including the inspection of bake-shops. This was to be complete enough to ensure a strict control of the flour from the time it left the mills till it reached the consumers. This was highly important as different systems of distribution were in operation and the necessity for a strict control of bread distribution could not be too strongly emphasised. This work of control was to form a separate section within the provincial services, to which a chemist was to be attached to analyse bread and if possible to assist in improving its quality.

(7) The provincial services were also required to set up some kind of executive machinery by which all the power of the provincial committee and the prestige of the American delegate could be brought to bear promptly upon local committees to correct irregularities and suppress abuses.

(8) In order to provide for the suppression of illicit traffic, each provincial



service was requested to organise a special service of investigation, to which should be attached a lawyer of experience and two or more private detectives, or police agents detailed by the courts. The heads of the service were to keep in constant touch with the public prosecutors and were to secure their co-operation in bringing legal proceedings against those engaged in illicit trade in imported food.

In general these requirements were promptly complied with by the provincial committees, and within a short time most of the provincial services of inspection and control were operating successfully. In order to keep them up to a desired standard, the American representative in charge of the general department of inspection and control made constant visits to the provinces. He made himself a much-needed link between the provincial offices and was able to give much help by explaining the details of the objects to be obtained and by bringing to all the other provinces successful methods which had been worked out in some one province.

**Difficulties in the establishment of the Provincial Services.**—At first there was displayed a considerable tendency on the part of the regional committees to oppose the reorganisation of the services of inspection and control. Their authority had been greatly reduced, as the new service was not under their control and was required to present to the provincial committees and to the Comité National complete reports as to the way in which each regional committee was discharging its duties. But, gradually, as the regional committees found that the work of a service of inspection resulted in bringing about a well-ordered distribution system and in reducing the annoyance and the difficulties of the old regime, they became reconciled. By the end of the month of June, the essential requirements outlined above had been put into effect except in the province of Brabant. At that time the number of inspectors and controllers had been increased to 235, including the staffs of the services of investigations and numerous other special agents. In Brabant the provincial committee was unwilling to enforce the radical reforms necessary, although the reports of the inspectors of the general department showed that the conditions in Brabant, as far as obedience to instructions by local committees was concerned, were incomparably worse than in any other part of Belgium. Finally, the situation became so bad that the British Foreign Office intimated to Mr. Hoover that it would forbid the distribution of food in the province of Brabant unless the regulation of the general department of inspection and control were carried out in that province. While in Belgium at the end of July, Hoover therefore personally intervened with the provincial committee. Such an authoritative statement of the necessity for action led the provincial committee to give up their opposition. A properly organised provincial service of inspection was finally installed and by the end of August was operating in a satisfactory manner.

**The extension of the work of Inspection and Control.**—The department of inspection and control, like every other branch of the Commission's work, was constantly undergoing transformation and adjustment to the new situations which presented themselves in kaleidoscopic sequence. The subjects within the scope of the investigation departments were constantly increased. The department not only looked after the distribution of food-stuffs imported by the Commission, it also carefully watched the German authorities to see that they adhered to the various guarantees in regard to the non-requisition of Belgian produce of all sorts.

The general department, of course, did most of its work through the provincial services. There were variations in organisation in every province, due to the difference

in conditions. In certain provinces, such as Antwerp and Hainaut, the work of provincial inspection was especially efficient, and these services were the source of many new ideas and methods of procedure. In most of the provinces complete regulations were drawn up in accordance with the recommendations of the general department for the instruction of the local communes. These were practically a codification of the regulations of the Comité National and the provincial committee. Mr. Green in his report has included as examples a set of these regulations and a model of the questionnaires used by the controllers in their inspections of local committees.

**The Work of the General Department.**—The general department maintained a small staff of eleven general inspectors who periodically went about the provinces to make investigations in certain communes and thus to check the work of the provincial services. They filled up a questionnaire, which was turned in to the general department. Anything in the operation of the provincial services which was found to be irregular was brought to the notice of the provincial services concerned with a request that a report of the action taken in correcting these irregularities should be returned to the central office. This check on the provincial inspection services proved of the highest importance, especially during the period of organisation. It gave the Brussels office complete knowledge of the way in which the regulations were being applied and made it possible to stimulate the efficiency of the local organisations. The department also maintained its own special service of investigation, with the co-operation of a private detective of the highest reputation and a police official in close touch with the judicial authorities. Investigations were made of serious cases, chiefly of illicit traffic in foodstuffs, which involved breaches of the law. These agents reported directly to the police and to the courts and arranged for the arrest of the culprits and for the seizure of foodstuffs obtained by illicit traffic. Complaints sent over from London originating from the British Foreign Office were investigated by these special agents.

**Reports by the Provincial and General Services.**—The general department kept in close touch with the provincial services by the constant interchange of reports and correspondence. Each provincial service was required to send to the central office six reports each week; a report relating to violations of the guarantees with all possible details and with a statement of what steps had been taken to obtain satisfaction from the local German authorities; a report of all cases involving breaches of law; a report on the action of the police and of the courts in such cases; a list of the local committees in communes where grave violations of regulations were suspected and a visit of the general inspector was considered advisable; a report of cases too complex to be handled by the provincial service of investigation and requiring the intervention of the detectives of the department; and a report on changes in the machinery of the provincial service, with copies of all regulations and forms.

The chief of the department of inspection and control representing the Commission prepared a weekly report for the director at Brussels, giving a summary of all the activities of the department. The director was in this way kept informed of all cases of infraction of the guarantees, of all proved irregularities in food distribution, and of all modifications in the provincial organisations. Two copies of these reports were turned over to the American Minister; one was retained in Brussels and another was forwarded to London for the information of that office. With the help of the service of inspection and control thus created, the Commission was able to effectively check the operations of Belgian

committees and the observance of the guarantees by the Germans, and was therefore able to satisfy the British Government that the Commission was effectively performing its function and was using every possible means to secure the thorough control over relief operations and the just distribution of foodstuffs demanded by the allied governments.

## RESULTS ACHIEVED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF INSPECTION AND CONTROL

**The Enforcement of the Guarantees given by the Germans.**—‘The three immediate objects of the machinery of inspection and control were the investigation of all infractions of the guarantees given by the German authorities, the suppression of illicit traffic in foodstuffs and the securing of equitable distribution of the relief to the civil population. But it was not enough that the department should detect and investigate the irregularities and the abuses. In so far as possible, they must be prevented from recurring.’ In these words Mr. Green in his report sums up the objects of the work undertaken by the department of inspection and control. In the course of his report he points out a fact which has seldom been recognised, that is, that the Commission and its American delegates had but little difficulty in protecting the imported foodstuffs from requisition by the Germans. So far as imported foods were concerned, the German authorities meticulously lived up to the solemn guarantees given by the Imperial Government in Berlin and by the General Government in Brussels. In Belgium special army orders were issued forbidding the soldiers to take or to touch the imported food-supplies. Special placards, stamped by German authorities, protected all imported goods in transit and in the warehouses, mills and distribution depôts. In addition to the placards, the flag of the Comité National was flown over all the warehouses and distributing centres. The text of the placard, issued on January 1, 1915, and continued into effect until the end of August 1916, read as follows: ‘By order of the German General Government in Belgium all merchandise belonging to the Comité National de Secours et d’Alimentation and destined to supply the needs of the Belgian civil population is exempt from requisition and seizure by the German military or civil authorities. The drivers, draught animals and vehicles of every kind used for the transportation of this merchandise are also exempt from requisition or seizure.’

Very few cases ever occurred in which food was actually taken from the Commission’s warehouses or depôts by the Germans, and in these few cases the German higher authorities acted promptly in making restitution of the supplies taken or by meting out punishment to the offenders. Many cases of supposed requisitions were continually reported by the British Foreign Office to the Commission, but when these cases were carefully investigated by the department of inspection and control they were usually discovered to be without foundation.

**Cases of interference by the Germans.**—The Germans likewise interfered very little in the actual distribution of the imported foods. They had promised the Commission and the Comité National complete freedom of action in the distribution of relief foods and funds. As time went on there arose very different interpretations as to how far this liberty of action extended, and many cases of interference by the Germans occurred or were reported. These cases were looked into and reported upon by the department of inspection and control. Many of these difficulties arose over a question of the definition of the civil population of Belgium. The Germans contended that the German civilians in Belgium

were part of the civil population of that country and that they were therefore entitled to draw their food ration on the same basis as Belgian civilians. The Belgian committees naturally objected to this and in many cases were given peremptory orders by the German authorities to issue rations to the German civilians concerned. A definite interpretation of the phrase 'civil population' was finally agreed upon by the Germans and the Commission in April 1916, and after that time but few cases of such interferences occurred.

Mr. Green refers also to other interferences by the Germans in the administration of the relief. Thus he says: 'Attempts were made to enforce petty regulations as to the exact wording of posters and price-lists in the stores, the use of the Flemish language in Walloon provinces, the weekly ration allowed to rabbits, the use of bicycles by controllers.' These petty annoyances finally became so vexing that in July 1916 Mr. Hoover was compelled to protest to the General Government in Brussels, through the Vermittlungsstelle, against these continual interferences. His protest seems to have resulted in the lessening of the number of cases of interferences by petty German officials.

**The problem of suppressing Illicit Traffic in Imported Foods.**—The suppression of illicit traffic was one of the most serious problems encountered by the department of inspection and control. It attempted, in the first place, to cut off the illicit traffic at the source by making sure that an effective control was maintained over the local committees and that these bodies followed explicitly the regulations of the Comité National. As a further means of stopping the leakage of food into illicit traffic the department inaugurated a campaign for enlightening the public as to the real purpose of the relief organisations and as to obligations of the consumers. Many of the people saw no harm in selling at a great profit to themselves the rations of foodstuffs which they received from the committee and did not absolutely need. The strict enforcement of the obligation printed on the household ration card and the prosecution of some of the offenders in the Belgian courts had, however, a very salutary influence and resulted in a great decrease in illicit trafficking. The department, through its service of investigation, carefully watched all suspected traders in imported food, and whenever evidence was found, seized their stocks and brought them before the courts of justice on charges of illicit trading in imported food. As another means of reducing illicit traffic, the department provided for thorough checking of the books of the local committees to make sure that they were carefully observing the regulations as to distribution. If the local committees paid no heed to instructions, or deliberately refused to obey them, they were threatened by the provincial committees of stoppage of all supplies except flour until such time as the regulations were complied with. Usually this threat was enough to bring the local committees to terms. Occasionally, however, the provincial committees had to be called on to discharge a whole local committee and organise a new one in communes where the former committees had proved unmanageable. The Germans repeatedly objected to the use of any form of coercion by the Commission, the Comité National, or the provincial committees to compel recalcitrant committees to obey orders. This had been one of the demands made by the Germans in June 1915 and was sternly repeated in a letter of July 1916, when it was stated that the German authorities would no longer tolerate threats on the part of higher committees to cut off supplies of any communal committee. But, by this time, most of the local committees had been brought into effective control and rigorous measures were seldom needed.

**Causes and Methods of Illicit Traffic.**—The department of inspection and control made a thorough investigation of the causes and methods of illicit traffic. They found

that there were five principal sources of the stocks of imported food which had become the subject of illicit trafficking. In the first place, many local committees had sold out, during the summer and fall of 1915, large quantities of various foods which they had received, with the excuse that they had more than was needed for their population. Many of the committees had acquired considerable stocks of food, such as beans, peas and rice, as a result of the requirements of the provincial committees that local committees should accept the quantities of foodstuffs allotted to them on the basis of the population. At the time the consumption was not very great, as native supplies of vegetables still existed and stocks soon accumulated. The local committees were required to pay for these foodstuffs on delivery. Many of the local committees, short of funds and unable to turn over their stocks of food, had sold their stocks to traders in order to raise money. Secondly, traders were able to buy from the individual householders the rations that they had received in rice, peas and beans which were not strictly required. Thirdly, there were, of course, amongst the 40,000 or more people engaged in the food distribution, a certain number who were actually dishonest and sold supplies entrusted to them. Fourthly, there were numerous small thefts of food from lighters and warehouses, and the quantities stolen were added to the amount illicitly sold. The last principal source of food leakage was in the baking of bread: many of the bakers would sell certain proportions of the flour received or would adulterate the stocks in such a way as to accumulate reserves that they could dispose of at great profit.

The department of inspection and control made extended investigations into all these various kinds of leakage and during the year 1916 brought hundreds of cases to trial in the Belgian courts. These energetic measures brought about a great diminution in the volume of illicit traffic.

**Results obtained in checking Illicit Traffic.**—Mr. J. C. Green, the head of the department of inspection and control representing the Commission, was able to report to the director on July 15, 1916: 'The increased control over the distribution of foodstuffs, through the use of *cartes de menage*, uniform bookkeeping, etc., and the increased inspection of the operations of the local committees, have made impossible any traffic on a large scale in imported goods similar to that which caused us many difficulties during the autumn and early winter. We invariably find that any quantities of our goods now discovered in the hands of the merchants, who are not entitled to them, escaped from our control before the month of January. The cases of traffic in imported foodstuffs now under investigation by our special service of surveyors are all cases involving small quantities of merchandise. The cases of goods escaping from our control through resale by persons who have bought them at retail are rapidly decreasing in number and are now largely restricted to certain districts, in which vigorous efforts are now being made to stamp them out. Almost all the cases now under investigation are cases involving burglary or simple theft, rarely complicated by the dishonesty of local committees or their agents. We are often able to bring about the seizure of such stolen goods by the judicial authorities. Otherwise they become the object of commerce and ultimately fall into the hands of patissiers, brewers, distillers, etc. We are convinced that the quantity of imported goods ultimately falling into the hands of the occupying forces is now so small as to be almost negligible.'

**The Problem of controlling and protecting Native Foodstuffs.**—The problem of supervising the observance by the Germans of the guarantees given by the Governor-General as to the disposing of the native food-supplies of Belgium was a much more difficult and complicated matter than the control of imported food. No machinery was ever set

up by the Germans for ensuring the observance of the undertakings they had given to respect indigenous products and to leave them to the civil population in Belgium. The Germans themselves had not the same compunction about taking native foods that they had always shown in the case of the foods imported by the Commission. Guarantees given to protect native supplies were regarded by the Germans as being in the nature of promises extorted as a result of the demands of the allied governments. The Germans agreed that it was reasonable that they should not take supplies imported by the Commission, but they felt quite differently when it was a question of the food produced in the country which they were ruling as a conquered province and in which they believed themselves entitled to the rights of conquerors.

**The Guarantees protecting Native Products in Belgium.**—The first guarantee protecting native supplies was that given by the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs on December 31, 1914, which was carried into effect by von Bissing's army order of January 21, 1915. In the summer of 1915 this guarantee was supplemented and continued by the guarantee of July 4, in which the Governor-General agreed to leave the Belgian harvest of breadstuffs to the civil population, and by the letter of von der Lancken of July 29, 1915, in which he stated that the Governor-General had agreed to continue to enforce the guarantees previously given, including that relative to native foods. This reservation of the crop to the Belgians created new matter to be controlled and a new possibility for violations of the guarantees. The grain had to be requisitioned from the farmers and turned over to the provincial committees for distribution at prices fixed by the Governor-General. The problem of control was complicated by the provision that the farmers could retain a certain proportion of the crop for their own use and for the next sowing. The price of grain on the open market had risen to so high a figure that it was a very great source of temptation to the farming population, who could reap enormous profits by concealing large proportions of their crops and selling them to the unauthorised agents who went about the country buying up grain and flour. In spite of the decree of the Governor-General, many small mills continued to mill wheat and sell flour, and this illicit traffic in flour was one of the most difficult problems with which the department of inspection and control had to deal. Inspectors of the department found that in the first three months of 1916 187,800 kgs. of flour had been illicitly shipped from the region of Louvain alone. This illicit flour traffic was especially serious because the chief purchasers were the patissiers (the pastry makers) and the German agents who were engaged either in supplying the German army in Belgium or in shipping food from Belgium to Germany.

**The Control of the Cereal Crops.**—The central crop commission and the provincial committees attempted to oblige the farmers to declare the stocks of grain produced by the harvest and to deliver the quantities provided for by the decree of the Governor-General. The department of inspection and control did everything in its power to secure the enforcement of the provisions of the decree. In this matter, however, it could not depend upon the invaluable aid of the Belgian police and the Belgian judicial authorities. The handling of the native crop was regulated by a decree of the Governor-General, and the Belgian courts had no jurisdiction, as offenders against the decree had to be brought before the German military courts. The department was unable to initiate proceedings against offenders in the military courts and had to depend upon the willingness of the Germans to initiate action in the cases brought to their attention. As the illicit traffic in flour was to a great degree carried on by German agents and operated to the direct advantage of

the German army, no serious steps were ever taken by the Germans on their own initiative to suppress the illicit traffic in flour. The Germans occasionally would prosecute and heavily punish a farmer or trader for violating the decree, but these actions were unusual. In some of the larger cities the Germans restricted or prohibited the manufacture of pastry and cakes; but this only increased the amount of fraudulent flour in the open market, which could be purchased by the German agents. Acting on representations by the Commission, the patron Ministers repeatedly protested against the growing traffic in flour, but with little result. The department of inspection and control was able to discover case after case of purchase of flour in Belgium by the German armies and its export to Germany, but the General Government usually chose to disregard such protests.

**The Enforcement of the April Guarantees.**—As a result of the negotiations carried on from December 1915 to April 1916, a guarantee had been obtained from the Governor-General that no food-supplies of any sort should be exported from the area of the General Government, and that the occupying army in Belgium would neither purchase nor requisition food-supplies in Belgium. This guarantee did not apply to purchases by individual soldiers but only to purchases by the commissariat department. On April 22, 1916, the Governor-General issued a decree putting this guarantee in operation. It immediately became the duty of the department of inspection and control to watch over the enforcement of this decree and to make sure that the Germans adhered to their promise. The matter was complicated by the provision that individual soldiers were still permitted to purchase food in the open market by the saving clause in the decree that in case there was an excess in the production of any article over the local consumption the exportation of this article should be permitted. Both of these exceptions provided loop-holes by which the Germans could continue to benefit largely by native production, and it became one of the chief duties of the department of inspection and control to investigate the infractions of these guarantees. This work necessitated a great increase in the staffs of the investigations services and of the provincial services. Hundreds of cases were investigated and reported on every month.

**Infractions of the Guarantees relating to Native Foods.**—Mr. Green has divided the infraction of these guarantees into six classes. The first was that of requisitions or forced purchases by the troops, especially of butter. Secondly, purchases by the commissariat or groups of soldiers continued to such an extent that the effect of the decree prohibiting such purchases was hardly apparent. The third class of cases was that of exported food from the territory of the General Government for the use of the German armies in Northern France. Agents of these armies came frequently to Belgium making purchases for the canteens of the armies. The fourth kind of violation was the contraband exportation of food-supplies from Belgium to Germany, especially across the frontier of the province of Liège. Some of the towns along the frontier line lay partly in Belgium and partly in Germany and were notorious smuggling centres; in one town, Welkenraedt, on one day, November 3, 1916, over 160,000 francs' worth of meat was smuggled into Germany. The investigation of this smuggling and attempts to secure its suppression provided serious occupation for many agents of the department of inspection and control. Fifth, large quantities of food-stuffs were exported openly by rail from Belgium to Germany. The shipments were composed of foods of all kinds: cattle, vegetables, sugar, biscuits and other supplies. The cattle trade assumed very serious proportions. Numerous Germans and many renegade Belgians acting as agents of German firms purchased in the Belgian cattle market for exportation to Germany. The department of inspection and control investigated the activities

of these agents. It was found, for example, that on a single day, October 25, 1916, four agents had purchased 700 head of cattle. The matter was a very serious one and the department used its best efforts to collect information and to provide the Ministers with facts upon which to base representations to the German authorities, calling for the suppression of these infractions of the guarantees. Sixth, the activity of the so-called centrales was also open to suspicion and was carefully watched over by a special section of the department of inspection and control under the direction of an American delegate. These centrales have already been described in a previous chapter. Their nominal function was the control of distribution of certain kinds of native products; but, actually, the exact nature of their operations were unknown to the public, and it was suspected that they were used by the German authorities as convenient cloaks to cover wholesale violations of the guarantees relating to native foodstuffs.

**The procedure followed in reporting Infractions of Guarantees.**—In all cases involving violations of the German guarantees a definite procedure was followed. First, the provincial inspection service would investigate reported cases, and on a basis of their reports the heads of the provincial committee would protest to the German civil government in the province. Usually no redress was obtained from this official and the case would then be transmitted to Brussels. The general department of inspection and control would make up reports to be presented to the Ministers in regard to these violations of guarantees. The activities of the department in this matter considerably annoyed and irritated the tender susceptibilities of the German officials. One of the civil governors stated that the department of inspection and control was altogether too minutely informed of what went on in the country and that it constituted an intolerable system of espionage. As a result of the difficulties encountered by the provincial services, the general department put into effect, in September 1916, a new system of collecting information as to violations of guarantees. Weekly reports of all cases occurring in the provinces were sent to Brussels by the provincial services, in sealed envelopes addressed to the patron Ministers. These reports were looked over by the central office and in serious cases were specially investigated by agents of the general department. The department, when the facts of any case were discovered, would send back the case to the province to be brought to the attention of the civil governor. But 90 per cent. of all cases so referred were disregarded by the provincial governors and were referred back to the general department which drew up the memoranda in regard to very grave cases, or groups of cases of a particular sort. These memoranda were transmitted jointly by the director of the Commission and the president of the comité exécutif of the Comité National to the patron Ministers, and by them to the German authorities. The Germans would usually either disregard the protest or enter into long and involved explanations, declaring that the case referred to either did not happen or was covered by the loopholes in the April guarantees referred to above.

In spite of all the efforts of the department of inspection and control to check the infractions of the guarantees, the American representative in charge of the department declared on November 5, 1916, that 'the exportation of large quantities of indigenous foodstuffs from Belgium has become a matter of common knowledge. It is no exaggeration to say that the guarantees of the Governor-General in regard to exportation have become a dead letter.'

**Action taken by the German Authorities on reported Infraction of Guarantees.**—Occasionally the political department would be stirred, by some specially energetic protest of



the Ministers, into taking action. Occasionally new orders would be sent out forbidding the troops to requisition or purchase food-supplies. The frontier guard between Belgium and Germany was strengthened and measures were taken to diminish the contraband trade, which did have some results. But, as Mr. Green states in his report, the real secret of the difficulties of the relief organisation in this matter lay in conflict of authority between the Governor-General, who was apparently really desirous that his promises should be kept, at least in most respects, and the military authorities over whom he had no control.

Thus, in a general way, it can be said that the department of inspection and control brought about a real observance of the instructions relative to relief work by the local committees ; that its activities resulted in the very great diminution of the illicit traffic in imported food ; that its best efforts were used to supervise and inspect the observance of the guarantees ; and that, in this matter, it succeeded in bringing to light the gravest abuses and in providing the Ministers with the evidence on which detailed and accurate protests could be made. Its efforts undoubtedly resulted in a very great decrease in the export of native food from Belgium, and for the first time a really strict control was placed over the food supply of Belgium.

## CHAPTER XII

## THE COMMISSION'S WORK IN 1916

## CHANGES IN ORGANISATION AND IN PERSONNEL IN BELGIUM

**Changes in the organisation of the Brussels Office.**—The organisation of the Commission had to be considerably extended in the course of the year 1916, in order to meet the increased burdens put upon it, on the one hand, by the increase in its imports and, on the other, by the need of exerting a stricter and more rigid control over the distribution of supplies and over the observance of the German guarantees.

In October 1915 a considerable modification of the Commission's organisation had been made. Mr. Crosby decided that he had to return to America. He was succeeded as director at Brussels by Dr. Vernon L. Kellogg, who had made a splendid success of his work as chief representative in Northern France. To assist Dr. Kellogg in the handling of the business details in the work of the Commission, Mr. Hoover was able to secure the volunteer services of Mr. W. B. Poland, an American railroad engineer of long experience and of the highest efficiency. Mr. Poland became assistant director of the Brussels office and to him was turned over the whole of the administration of the business details involved in the work of the Commission, while Dr. Kellogg found more than enough to do in attempting to handle the relations with the Germans and with the Belgian committees and to ensure the smooth working of the organisation in general. Mr. Caspar Whitney succeeded Dr. Kellogg as chief representative for Northern France. His work there was interrupted, however, for in December he left with Dr. Kellogg to make an extended trip through the parts of Poland occupied by the German and Austrian armies to make a report on the possibility of putting into effect an ambitious relief program for Poland. When Dr. Kellogg left on this errand, Mr. Poland became the director of the Brussels office and remained in that capacity until July 1916.

**Mr. Poland develops a Systematic Organisation.**—Mr. Poland brought into the Brussels office a thorough knowledge of business methods and an instinct for scientific organisation. Until the beginning of his administration the Brussels office had been running along in a rather haphazard way. The shipping department, it is true, had been splendidly organised and administered by M. Baetens, but no similarly satisfactory methods had been worked out by the Brussels office for checking the actual distributions inside Belgium, for ascertaining the stocks of food available, and for fixing the rations. The Commission had depended almost altogether upon the Comité National to keep them informed of the situation. Mr. Poland, however, renovated and strengthened the statistical department and succeeded in putting a thoroughly systematic organisation into effect in the Brussels office. It became possible under the changes which he put into effect to follow the stocks day by day on charts in his office and to know at a glance the situation in regard to all kinds of food in all regions of Belgium and Northern France.

**Changes in the Secretariat.**—Mr. Robinson Smith came up from Mons in July 1915 to act as general secretary and adviser in matters of rationing and food distribution. In

this position he was able to put the whole of his varied experience at the service of the Brussels office. From Belgium Robinson Smith went to London, where he became, and still is, among many other things, the Commission's food expert. He left Belgium in January 1916, and was succeeded as general secretary by Mr. Lewis Richards, who had organised the Commission's work in Greater Brussels. It was Mr. Richards who had devised and put into operation the card catalogue of the population of Brussels which had made possible the checking of the bread distribution and the combing out of some 150,000 extra rations of flour which had been distributed to bakers who had fraudulently padded their lists. Mr. Richards, after performing this service in Greater Brussels, had gone to Northern France in April 1915 as chief representative for the most important French district, that of the north, with headquarters at Valenciennes. After a few months there he went to Holland, where he helped in the Rotterdam office until Hoover asked him to return to Brussels to become general secretary. He remained at this post until July 1916, when he went out to Rotterdam again, this time to become assistant director of the Commission's office there. Almost a year later he was called to London as assistant director of the central office of the Commission, in which capacity he is still serving. Mr. Richards, because of his experience and personal qualities, proved throughout his whole service to be one of the most valuable of the Commission's representatives.

**Changes in the personnel of the Commission in Belgium.**—The personnel of the Commission changed greatly during the summer and fall of 1915. Nearly all of the early delegates who had organised the Commission's operations in the provinces were compelled for one reason or another to return to America. Only a very few of the original delegates remained at their posts. Among these were E. D. Curtis, whose exploits have been immortalised in more than one article on the Commission's work; W. H. Sperry, who represented the Commission in many capacities with equal ability and who, after serving as the milling representative of the Commission, took up the work of passport secretary after Bulle's death; F. W. Meert, chief representative for Brabant province; C. H. Carstairs, whose marriage with a Belgian girl was one of the romances of the Commission; Gardner Richardson, who arrived in May 1915 and became chief representative for France and later for Antwerp.

Many of the original men returned to Belgium after an interval for a second period of service. C. G. Bowden and J. L. Glenn each returned twice. Stockton and Kittredge, two of the other Oxford men, likewise returned in the summer of 1916 for further service. But the greater part of the Commission's staff in Belgium in 1916 and 1917 was made up of new men who had been sent from America. They carried on in the most admirable way the record of achievement set by the first delegates and added new lustre to the traditions of the Commission for Relief in Belgium. Many of these later delegates performed service of the greatest value to the Commission. Prentiss N. Gray, who went to Belgium in January 1916, became assistant director at Brussels and remained as director after the departure of the American Minister to continue the relief work until the Spanish-Dutch committee could take it over. J. C. Green did excellent work as head of the department of inspection and control. In view of the efficient work done by nearly all the men who went to Belgium it would be invidious to single out for special mention any other delegates. A record of the services of the various men will be given in another place. During the course of the year 1916 there continued to be periodic changes in personnel. Several delegates would find it necessary to leave each month, and they were replaced

by other men sent from America. But with the characteristic adaptability of Americans they soon became nearly as experienced members of the Commission for Relief in Belgium as the veteran Curtis himself.

Mr. Poland continued as director until July 1916, when he was summoned to London to take over the management of the Commission's affairs there. He has continued to serve the Commission there to the time of the present writing, first as director of the London office, and, after April 1917, as director for Europe. He was succeeded in Brussels, in July 1916, by Dr. Vernon L. Kellogg, who returned to become a second time director of the Commission in Belgium. Dr. Kellogg remained until November and succeeded in carrying through successfully a series of difficult negotiations with the Germans for the better protection of the Commission's work and for the better observance of the guarantees in Belgium. He succeeded also in securing an increase in the ration of food given by the Germans to the French population. He left Belgium to become general assistant to Mr. Hoover in London, and was succeeded by Mr. Warren Gregory, a well-known attorney of San Francisco. Mr. Gregory remained as director until the American members of the Commission withdrew from Belgium.

The Brussels Office in 1916.—In the Brussels office, after July 1916, Mr. Prentiss N. Gray played a very considerable part. His previous business experience, his large commonsense grasp of problems and his simple directness in getting to the root of difficulties made him invaluable as assistant director, in which position he carried on the work which Mr. Poland had begun of systematising the business aspects of the Commission's work. He was the right-hand man both to Dr. Kellogg and to Mr. Gregory, and the efficiency of the Commission's office in the later months of 1916 and the beginning of 1917 was in no small degree due to Gray.

C. M. Torrey, as secretary and general assistant to the director, was also a most invaluable man and kept the secretariat in a state of the highest efficiency. Of course M. Baetens remained, as always, directing the work of the shipping department. Amid the constant changes in the personnel in the Brussels office M. Baetens alone has remained at his post from December 1914 to the present writing. He has been the one permanent fixture in the office of the Commission in Brussels, the one link between the succeeding administrations, and to his advice and counsel the Commission owes an infinite debt.

Another of the men in the Brussels office, who had been with the Commission from the beginning, and whose work has often been referred to, was M. German Bulle, who remained in charge of the passport department of the Commission and as its representative in the central crop commission until his death in December 1916. As in the case of M. Baetens, too much cannot be said in praise of the unselfish devotion with which M. Bulle served the Commission. His death was a great loss to the Commission and a real sorrow to all of the many Americans who had at various times served in Belgium.

The Provincial Delegates and their Functions.—The work of the delegates in the provinces (called 'representatives' after the summer of 1915) became much more difficult and of much more routine character during the year 1916. The organisation of the department of inspection and control imposed a considerable mass of routine work on the delegates. The provincial inspectors usually worked under the direction of the American delegate, who for the most part presided over the weekly meetings of the inspectors. The work of

checking up the reports of inspectors and of remedying the abuses and defects revealed kept the provincial delegates thoroughly occupied.

The old conflict as to the precise powers and functions of the delegates came up in 1916 as often as it had done in 1915. In 1916 it centred chiefly about the activities of the department of inspection and control, and serious difficulties arose between the Commission and the Comité National. There was a strong group of delegates in 1916, as in 1915, who believed that the Commission should exert an executive influence over the operations of the Belgian committees, and there was another group that, as in 1915, were inclined to take the position which had been mentioned by Mr. Hoover from the beginning, viz. the delegates should take on themselves no powers and no duties which were not strictly necessary to the success of the work.

In general the organisation of the Commission experienced but few changes throughout 1916. The delegates in the various provinces continued, for the most part, to perform the duties that their predecessors had marked out for them. Through the efforts of M. Bulle the delegates continued to receive regularly their passports. M. Dulait and his automobile department kept the cars of the Commission in operation. In general the relations with the German authorities were not unpleasant, though as the year 1916 drew to its close there occurred repeated incidents which tended to make more and more unpleasant the contact between the Germans and the Americans.

So, in Northern France, as in Belgium, the delegates changed frequently but continued to perform the same duties. In France, the German officers came gradually to usurp many of the functions previously performed by the delegates, but the representatives in France were usually of sufficient character and personality to keep a controlling hand on the situation and to make sure that the regulations of the Commission were observed.

The Commission becomes an Institution.—By the end of 1916 the Commission was functioning as practically a permanent organisation. Its constitution had become stable, its methods had become well defined, its activities had come to follow definite traditions. The Commission for Relief in Belgium had become what its founders had hoped, a great and vital institution. The temporary measures adopted at the beginning had been gradually replaced by permanent arrangements or methods, and had it not been for the breach of the relations between the United States and Germany the American organisation of the Commission in Belgium would have probably continued indefinitely to perform the functions which by the end of 1916 had become clearly defined.

#### GENERAL PROGRESS OF THE RELIEF WORK IN 1916

Negotiations with the Germans in 1916.—In the previous chapters devoted to negotiations to secure new guarantees to protect native food products and with the organisation of a department of inspection and control, some of the most important of the developments of the year 1916 have already been described. In the course of the year many other minor negotiations were also undertaken with the Germans covering a great variety of subjects: the securing of adequate passports and protection for the Commission's lighters and tugs, as well as for the Commission's representatives; the negotiations, in the summer of 1916, of a convention with the Germans to reserve Belgian fertilisers to the use of the Belgian people; the endeavours of the Commission to check the wholesale

deportations of workmen began in the fall of 1916. These varied subjects illustrate very well how diversified were the Commission's activities.

**Food Deliveries and Shipping Difficulties.**—The importations continued steadily to flow into Rotterdam in sufficient quantities to meet the needs in Belgium. After the difficulties which had occurred in October and November 1915 in securing lighters to move the Commission's supplies into Belgium, no further difficulty was experienced in getting the shipments to the warehouses in Belgium until the beginning of the submarine campaign of 1916. The German threat to carry on unrestricted warfare against all vessels within waters about the British Isles caused great embarrassment to the Commission. In another place the detailed negotiations to secure protection of shipping at that time will be described. Here it is sufficient to state that, as a result of the sinking of several of the Commission's ships without warning, the Commission suddenly found its overseas shipping problem tremendously aggravated. As a result, the importations to Belgium decreased materially in the months of March and April.

The program of the Commission for the year 1916 called for the delivery of approximately 100,000 tons of food per month at Rotterdam. In March only 75,000 tons were delivered; in April only 62,000 tons; and the result was such a rapid decrease of the stocks in Belgium as threatened to make it necessary to reduce the already insufficient rations. The negotiations which grew out of the 'Sussex' incident led, however, to the abandonment by the Germans of the unrestricted submarine warfare, since the Germans agreed, in their note of May 10 in reply to Wilson's ultimatum, to sink no ships without previous warning. As a result of this general promise to the United States, the Germans granted such concessions to the Commission that it was able to send its ships through the English Channel to Rotterdam. In May, therefore, the Commission was able to deliver 112,500 tons in Rotterdam, and from that time until the end of the year the operations never fell below 100,000 tons. They were, in fact, usually considerably above that figure, especially after September 1916, when the shipping program was increased with the permission of the allied governments.

**The Machinery of Distribution continues as in 1915.**—There were but few changes in the plans for the provisionment and the relief of Belgium during the early part of 1916. The food distribution continued to be made in accordance with the methods worked out in 1915, which were supervised and perfected during the year through the operation of the department of inspection and control. In February the old household ration-cards were called in and a new set was issued. The issue of these was carefully checked to prevent fraud and eliminate duplication of rations. As a result of the agreements entered into with the British Government in February 1916, the Commission restricted the distribution of its imported food, with the exception of bread, to that part of the population which was either wholly destitute or in straitened circumstances as a result of the war. Even so, it was found necessary to issue rations to more than five million people in Belgium, i. e. to 70 per cent. of its population.

The distribution of relief was continued much as in 1915. This relief consisted, on the one hand, of the gratis distribution of food to the destitute; on the other hand, of the payments of additional benefits to families of soldiers and to the unemployed. These measures were in general found sufficient to meet the needs of the increasing number of destitute; but it had become evident by the summer of 1916 that the general vitality of the Belgian people, and especially of the children, was being lowered as a result of two

years of privation. In drawing up the program of work for 1916-17, provision was made for increased food rations for the children and for the impoverished labouring classes. The methods devised to provide for this increased ration will be described in the next section.

**Relations with the German Authorities.**—The creation by the German Government of the *Vermittlungsstelle* in December 1915 contributed greatly to bring about more harmonious relations between the Commission and the German Government in Belgium. The officers in charge of the *Vermittlungsstelle* were usually sympathetic to the Commission and its purposes and intervened in its favour when it became involved in difficulties. There were, it is true, a certain number of unpleasant incidents during the course of the year, which made the delegates in general feel rather bitter toward the attitude of the General Government. The periodical searches of delegates were continued, and, especially in the case of those delegates whose duties required them to occasionally cross the frontier to Holland, life was made very unpleasant by the attitude of the frontier authorities. The delegates were often subjected to grilling examinations. It was an ordinary event for the delegates to be stripped and to have their automobiles searched with the most meticulous care. On one occasion an unhappy delegate was arrested, taken to the offices of the *Krieschef* in the locality where he happened to be, thoroughly stripped and then put into a room to wait action in his case! He was seated facing a wall placarded with official announcements of the execution of Belgians and others condemned to death for espionage and similar charges. It was obviously cold comfort for the delegate to be compelled to sit for several hours staring at these blackleaded proofs of what the Germans might do if they saw fit. The delegate was finally released, but had to experience similar treatment almost every time he went across the frontier.

**Illustrations of the Attitude of the Germans.**—On another occasion one of the Commission's representatives, while riding along a country road in his automobile, passed a German officer riding on horse-back. The officer's horse shied at the car. This caused considerable annoyance to the officer. He ordered the car to stop and demanded from the chauffeur the name of the person in the car and the number of the car. The representative interfered and asked the German officer for his own name, stating that he would be pleased to exchange cards, but that his chauffeur was not under any order of the German officer. This merely added to the fury of the German and he rode away muttering threats. A few days later the representative was summoned before a military court, convicted of the crime of having insulted the German army and was sentenced to pay a fine of 500 marks. In spite of the efforts of the *Vermittlungsstelle* to get the sentence remitted, the delegate was compelled to pay his fine.

There were other similar cases which occurred during the year to increase the unpleasantness between Germans and Americans in Belgium. The German officers in Brussels felt aggrieved, especially after the 'Sussex' incident, to see the Americans wandering freely about Brussels in automobiles and speaking English in the streets and in the cafés and restaurants. On more than one occasion German officers made charges against certain of the delegates for remarks which they had overheard pass between the Americans in the street or in the restaurants. The Germans seemed to be in that curious psychological state in which they expected the Americans to be hostile to them. Perhaps their consciences were a bit sensitive. At any rate, many of them went out of their way to be gratuitously unpleasant to the Americans whom they occasionally saw. It was no uncommon experience for American delegates, seated in a restaurant, to hear German officers at an adjoining

table speaking in a loud voice of the insolence of these 'verdammte Amerikaner' in daring to intrude their presence into the sacred neighbourhood of the officers of the Imperial and Royal German army.

**The Attitude of the Delegates.**—The Americans, however, lived up to their obligation of neutrality and, though occasionally irritated by the attitude of the Germans, held their peace and kept to their work. The question of keeping Belgium from starvation was infinitely more important than the personal feelings of the members of the Commission. The representatives as a whole clearly realised this and submitted to the indignities they had often to suffer with the best grace possible. It must be said that the German officers who were in personal contact with the Commission and its representatives continued to be extremely courteous, and, officially, the relations of the Germans, at least until the beginning of the deportations of workmen, were on the whole more agreeable than had been the case in the previous year.

**Relations with the Belgian Committees.**—In the provinces the relations between the American representatives and the provincial committees continued to be of the most friendly character. The delegates were, as a rule, personally popular in the communities in which they lived and had few or no difficulties with the provincial or local committees. In each province the co-operation in the work had become well defined. The provincial committees had come to look upon the Americans to perform definite functions, which differed from province to province, and there were seldom any differences or any clashes of authority in the provinces. The Americans found their relations with the Belgians increasingly pleasant as time went on and as they grew to understand each other better. The Belgians recognised freely and enthusiastically the service which the Americans were rendering, and took every opportunity to manifest to the delegates their appreciation. It was only in the central office in Brussels and with the chief figures of the Comité National that the Commission had its real difficulties. These came to be so serious in 1916, and led to so grave a crisis in the conduct of the relief work, that it will be necessary to devote a special chapter to the disagreements that caused the misunderstanding. As a rule, the heads of the provincial committees supported the attitude of the Commission rather than that of the comité exécutif of the Comité National. The Belgian provincial leaders knew the work of the American delegates and realised that they had no reason to fear any usurpation of authority by the American representatives, whose only aim was to help the Belgians in whatever way and to as great an extent as possible.

**The Problems created by the Deportations of 1916.**—In France, as in Belgium, one of the big problems which arose in 1916 was that of the deportation of workmen. In fact the first organised efforts of the Germans to compel the civilian population of the occupied territories to work for them was made in France. The story of the deportees from Lille caused the greatest indignation in the outside world, and it is illustrative of the position of the Commission that the Commission's representatives and its director made such strenuous protests against the Lille deportations that the Germans discontinued them. This episode will be dealt with more fully in a later section. The question of forced labour both in France and in Belgium was one of the greatest gravity, and involved the Commission directly because it raised two questions: first, 'Was the Commission to continue to feed Belgians and French compelled to work for the Germans?' and, secondly, 'Could the Germans be prevented from using the operations of the Commission to force people to work for them?' The Commission made every effort to check the



deportations, but with limited success both in France and in Belgium. The Germans had apparently gotten to that point of desperation where they no longer cared about the feeling and opinion of the outside world and considered only their own immediate military interests. The last six months of 1916 passed with the question of deportations ever in the foreground. It was that which coloured the whole question of the relations between the Germans and the Commission.

**The question of the Requisition of Horses.**—Another of the questions which came up repeatedly during the year 1916 was that of protecting from requisitions the horses used by the distribution services of the Commission and the Comité National. On July 3, 1915, the Commission had been assured by the Governor of Brussels that, for the time being, the horses used by the local committees for the transport of foods would not be requisitioned, but that no assurance could be given as to the future. In the month of January 1916 the Germans began to make greatly increased requisitions of horses in Belgium, and a certain number of the horses used by the sub-committees of the Comité National in Brabant and elsewhere were included among the animals requisitioned at that time. The Commission immediately took up the matter through the patron Ministers, but was not able to get much satisfaction. On January 21, 1916, von der Laneken wrote to Whitlock that he had been able to obtain from the military authorities the concession that, until further notice, horses used by important industrial enterprises, the breweries and the ravitaillement would be exempted from requisition, if it could be shown that these horses were of absolute necessity for the work in question. Von der Laneken added, however, that it was difficult to know which horses were utilised by and were really necessary to the local relief committees. The Commission and the Comité National were therefore requested to notify the Vermittlungsstelle of the full number of horses required and used by the Comité National and its sub-committees.

In spite of this assurance the requisition of horses continued. In March a further protest was made through the Vermittlungsstelle to the General Government against the requisitions. On March 15 von der Laneken wrote again to Whitlock that he had once more addressed himself to the competent authorities, who had informed him that the measures taken made it possible to safeguard the interests of the sub-committees of the Comité National. He added that if any cases should present themselves in which horses indispensable to committees should be requisitioned, the committee in question, by presenting a request and by giving proof of their need for the horses requisitioned, could obtain their release from the military authorities.

**Renewed Requisitions of Horses used by the Committees.**— At the end of July and the beginning of August new requisitions of horses began, and once more it was found that the military authorities paid no attention to the needs of the local relief committees, a considerable number of whose horses were included in the requisitions. The Ministers, in a letter of August 22, pointed out that the working of the system of food distribution depended absolutely upon the transport provided by the horses of the local committees. Lists had already been drawn up by the Comité National and presented to the Vermittlungsstelle, giving the horses actually used in the ravitaillement, but to obtain greater precision in these lists the Comité National ordered the provincial committees to form new lists, including all the horses which were exclusively and continually used in the ravitaillement service. The Ministers requested the Governor-General to exempt the horses mentioned in these lists from any sort of requisition and to notify the military authorities

of the exemption from requisition granted to the Comité National. This letter was not answered until November 3, 1916, at which time von der Lancken merely stated that the measures he had outlined in his letter of March 5 had been regularly applied; that all applications from local committees had always been favourably considered by the military authorities and acceded to, whenever circumstances permitted; and that the military authorities in the provinces had instructed the burgomasters to see that the transports of the Comité National were assured, by placing at their disposal horses which might be available elsewhere.

**All Fit Horses taken from the Committees.**—In spite of these assurances from von der Lancken, hundreds of horses used in the ravitaillement continued to be seized. Finally, in December, the Germans decided definitely that the Commission and the Comité National would only be allowed to keep horses unfit for war purposes and that they therefore exchange any horses they had, that could be used by the Germans, for other animals unfit for military use. In a letter of December 20 the Vermittlungsstelle informed the Commission that the 2,225 horses used throughout the territory of the General Government in the operations of food distribution would be exempted on condition that all horses fit for war purposes should be in due time exchanged for such that were unfit. The requisition commission would give four weeks' information of the time of requisition in order to permit the change to be made. The horses unfit for war service to be used by the Commission for Relief in Belgium or the Comité National should be marked with a brand 'C.R.B. No. . . . ' and should be entered in a list to be kept by the German authorities. To prevent the misuse of this brand it was necessary that these horses should be brought to every muster ordered by the requisition commission. They would then be compared with the lists in the hands of the authorities, and, if found to tally, would be released without further examination. The Vermittlungsstelle added that, as a result of investigations they had made, they had ascertained that there were a sufficient number of horses in the territory of the Government unfit for war services which would yet be very serviceable for the work of food distribution. The authorities would permit the Commission to purchase horses in one district for use in another, if the prescribed permission was first obtained.

**The arrangement for Branding the Horses of the Committees.**—On January 18 this arrangement for branding the horses was further dealt with in a letter from the Vermittlungsstelle. The Vermittlungsstelle pointed out that the General Government could not agree to exempt sound and strong horses from requisition, and that if the 2,225 horses would not be sufficient for the work of the Commission, should unfit horses be used, the General Government would have no objection to permitting a greater number to be taken into the service of food distribution. It was provided that in the mustering of horses which was to be held in the district of Brussels and Brabant beginning on January 19, all Commission or Comité National horses should bear the brand 'C.R.B. No. . . . Br.' (for Brabant). In the other provinces a similar mark should be added to the brand to distinguish the province in which the horses were used. In order to make it possible for the Commission for Relief in Belgium and the Comité National to obtain horses to replace those requisitioned, a representative of the Commission for Relief in Belgium would be permitted to be present at all musters and to note the names of the owners of horses, not suitable for war purposes, which could be used in food distribution. The Comité National would then be permitted to negotiate with these owners for the purchase of the horses and, if the purchases were made, they could be branded as indicated above and entered in the lists. All horses of

the Commission requisitioned must be delivered in four weeks. The Vermittlungsstelle added that this would give sufficient time to replace those requisitioned.

It was on this basis that the question of requisition of horses was finally resolved. The sale of horses had been forbidden throughout the district of the Governor-General and the Commission was practically the only agency in Belgium permitted by the Germans to purchase the horses they deemed unfit for military purposes. It was naturally a great handicap to the operations of the local committees, to be compelled to exchange all the sound horses, if indeed they could find them, for old, unfit and decrepit animals, but 'Krieg ist Krieg,' as the Germans said, and the Commission had to accept the inevitable.

**Control of Relief Operations by the Germans.**—Before concluding this section on the relations with the Germans during 1916, a word must be said about the continued German efforts to exercise a more complete control over the relief operations. After December 1915 the Vermittlungsstelle had kept a close eye on the work of the Commission and of the Comité National. The censorship of all the correspondence of the relief organisations was turned over to this office. It was therefore as well and as fully informed of the progress of the relief work as were the Commission and the Comité National. At first the Vermittlungsstelle had been content to merely supervise and did not attempt to interfere. But in the summer of 1916 it attempted to obtain a much stronger control than the Germans had previously exercised.

The General Government decided in June 1916 to put into force the censorship regulations that they had decreed the year previously, but had withdrawn because of the opposition of the Commission and the Comité National. An order was therefore sent out that all mail for any relief body should pass through the ordinary post or through the civil officials in the provinces and at Brussels. The Commission attempted in vain to prevent the introduction of this regulation. After much discussion the relief bodies were compelled to accept the supervision they had successfully resisted in 1915. Certain important concessions were however obtained. The General Government finally agreed that the reports of the department of inspection and control and all papers relating to violations of the guarantees could be sent to the Ministers in Brussels in specially sealed envelopes without passing under the eye of a German censor. With this exception, however, all papers, letters and forms had to be transmitted from the local committees to the provincial committees and from the provincial committees to Brussels through the German civil officials.

The Germans made their special arrangements to expedite the correspondence of the relief bodies. Consequently the new arrangement, while annoying to all concerned, did not normally seriously delay their correspondence. As the work of the Commission was quite above board, it could submit to such a censorship and supervision without any derangement of its work. As confidential reports on the situation could always be made verbally by the members of the various committees and by the American delegates, the Commission was able to keep as fully informed as previously of all the activities of the Germans.

The new arrangement gave the Germans, however, an additional hold on the relief work. Every detail of the work became familiar to them and they were in a position to interfere effectively in any matter before action was taken on it. Previously they had often only learned of a proposed new measure after it was a *fait accompli* and then it was too late to interfere. Now they were forewarned of all matters and problems before the various committees acted and hence could exercise their control more efficiently. In general,

however, they did not seriously or frequently interfere. The officials of the Vermittlungsstelle were always in close touch with the heads of the Commission and the Comité National and had confidence in them. They preferred to interfere as little as possible, partly because interference, as they knew, meant trouble, partly because they could not raise many legitimate objections to the operations by the committees.

In practice, therefore, the new regulations proved much less troublesome and restrictive than had been feared. The vigilant watch of the Commission kept the Germans to the letter of their guarantees. The Commission's work was often facilitated rather than hampered by the supervision exercised by the Vermittlungsstelle. The Germans as a result of this supervision lost much of their suspicion of the relief bodies, and were content to accept the advice of the Vermittlungsstelle that the measures proposed and carried through by the Commission or the Belgian committees were not in conflict with the aims and intentions of the General Government. The removal of the atmosphere of opposition and suspicious hostility encountered previously more than made up for any disadvantages resulting from the stricter supervision exercised under the new regulations. The work continued satisfactorily on this basis from the summer of 1916 to the time of the withdrawal of the Americans from Belgium. The new Spanish-Dutch committee that took on the supervision within the occupied territories also found that in general the relations with the occupying authorities bequeathed them by the Americans were quite satisfactory.

#### HEALTH CONDITIONS IN BELGIUM IN 1916 AND THE APPEAL FOR AID TO THE CHILDREN

**Food Shortage and Under-nutrition in Belgium.**—In the spring of 1916 the gradually increasing mortality rate and the frequency of such diseases as tuberculosis led the Commission and the Comité National to enter into investigations to see what could be done to improve the health condition, especially of the children and working-men. There was found to exist a very considerable decrease in vitality due to insufficient nutrition.

On April 1, 1916, Francqui wrote to Hoover that he was painfully affected and appalled at the situation he found in Belgium on his return from London. The potato crop, he said, had practically disappeared, with the result that all classes were having increasing difficulty to secure the essential foods they needed. Milk was becoming very hard to obtain and butter had almost disappeared, as a result of the insufficient quantity and the bad quality of the food available for the cattle. The prices of milk and butter had increased so much that they were inaccessible to the great mass of the population. Francqui reported also that a situation bordering on famine had been suddenly revealed; that the existing stocks of native food had been practically exhausted, and that the Comité National could not foresee this development because it was ignorant of the stocks held by the shops and by individuals. The situation had grown so bad that practically 70 per cent. of the population were completely dependent on the imports of the Commission. He therefore urged that steps should be immediately taken to increase the imports of the Commission, as otherwise the population in the country would be reduced to a state of famine and would suffer all the sad moral, economic and political consequences attendant thereon. He enclosed a copy of a certificate, from leaders of the Belgian medical profession and from the chiefs of the hospital services, showing that there was a great and dangerous increase in mortality and in the frequency of diseases occasioned by under-nutrition.

The Investigation of Health Conditions in Belgium.—The reports from the Commission's representatives verified this representation of Francoqui's, and the Commission decided to have a special investigation of the situation made to enable it to find out what could be done to improve conditions. Mr. Hoover asked Dr. William P. Lucas, of the University of California, to go to Belgium and to make an investigation of the health conditions, especially in the case of children. Dr. Lucas agreed to undertake the work and arrived in Belgium in May, remaining three months in his investigations. During this time he consulted with the leading medical men and relief workers in all the chief places in Belgium and compiled a report describing the conditions which he found to exist.

Dr. Lucas's Report.—In this report he said that the chief questions he had examined were: the state of the health of the population as a result of the food and physical conditions existing since the beginning of the war; the result that had been obtained from the relief provided; the possibility of modifying the kind and method of food-supply to combat mal-nutrition; and, finally, the new measures which should be taken to improve the general health conditions. Dr. Lucas pointed out that with the exception of the increase in tuberculosis the population had been very free from epidemics and contagious diseases. With the exception of a serious epidemic of influenza, there had not been a single epidemic since the occupation by the Germans.

In his work he made three classifications of the population: the well-to-do class, the farmers, and the industrial and shop-keeping class. The first two classes, in Dr. Lucas's opinion, had not suffered as a result of the war, as they had been able to provide themselves with all the necessary foods. But, in the case of the third class, general health conditions were very different. This class had been maintained only by the extended organisation of relief and preventive measures. The 5,000,000 people included in this class had had their food rations reduced automatically, little by little, as food grew scarcer and prices higher, until they had left only a bare subsistence ration. Without doubt, the vitality and resistance to disease of the majority of this class had been weakened, and, although the general state of health, with the exception of the increase in tuberculosis, indicated no extreme tendency, yet certain definite symptoms had developed and it would be necessary to combat these to escape grave consequences.

The Increase in Tuberculosis.—The chief cause of the increase in tuberculosis, Dr. Lucas thought, to be decrease of vitality due to insufficient nourishment. Could normal conditions be established and plentiful food supplied, he believed that most of the adults not affected by tuberculosis would recover their normal health in two or three months. This did not apply, however, to those whom tuberculosis had attacked or to the adolescent children, who probably suffered more than any other class, but even these classes could be aided, and the progress of disease checked, by special and radical measures which should be adopted, such as providing the adolescent children in the schools with special supplementary food rations.

The cases of tuberculosis had increased at least 150 per cent. since 1914. In the case of tubercular infections of the glands of children there were five to ten times as many cases as existed before the war. In certain schools of Brussels, which were specially examined, it was found that about 70 per cent. of the children had developed tubercular glands. The increase in tuberculosis Dr. Lucas found to be especially noticeable in the large centres like Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent, Liège, Mons and Charleroi. He urged that the most serious effort should be made, by increasing the food-supply of the tuberculous and by providing

for the distribution of food in school canteens, to combat the danger resulting from the increased tuberculosis. In order to do this it would be especially necessary, in view of the shortage of fats and animal proteins in Belgium, to increase the lard and bacon importations of the Commission. Similarly, in order to combat the increasing shortage of milk, the Commission should take active steps to organise special herds of milk cows to furnish milk for the canteens and hospitals for children. At the same time the Commission should increase its importations of condensed milk to provide for the children during the winter, when the supply of fresh milk would fail.

Among the working class Dr. Lucas found a somewhat similar condition. The energy and productive power of the labourers had been considerably reduced. They became fatigued much quicker than formerly. It was estimated that 80 per cent. of the population had lost from 2 to 3 kilos of weight because of the insufficient quantities of fat and animal protein in their diet. It was found also that, in general, the children of women of the working class weighed 30 per cent. less when born than normally. In order to combat this he recommended the creation of special canteens for expectant mothers.

In general, Dr. Lucas found that the canteens for the babies were being admirably conducted, and that if an additional supply could be provided for these, the babies would not suffer in health. He paid a great compliment to the devotion with which the people of Belgium had attempted to care for the babies and young children, and said that their work had resulted in generally improving the physical condition of babies and children up to the adolescent age, until it was even above the normal average.

**Dr. Lucas recommends additional Canteen Rations.**—Dr. Lucas recommended especially that the Commission should establish canteens in the primary schools for the distribution of a special warm meal each day to children of the adolescent age. He said that there were approximately 850,000 children in the primary schools of Belgium, and that additional food should be imported to permit the distribution of warm lunches, not only in the primary, but also in the intermediate schools. This extension would raise to 1,500,000 the number of Belgian children to receive relief, while in the north of France there would probably be 500,000 more. Dr. Lucas made this his most important recommendation, as it would do more than anything else to better the health condition of children of the adolescent age. Coupled with this were recommendations that soup-canteens should be established for working people and for other special classes of the population in special need of additional food.

The Conference of June 15, 1916.—The result of the investigations into the state of health in Belgium was that the Commission proposed to greatly extend the work of the food-canteens for the winter of 1916–17. The matter was taken up actively in Brussels, and at a conference held on June 15, 1916, in which Hoover, Kellogg and Poland of the Commission, and Franquai, Janssens and Wouters of the Comité National participated, it was decided to extend the canteen arrangements. Hoover stated that he was convinced that it would be necessary to carry on the relief work for at least another twelve months, and that, in view of this fact, it was necessary to consider certain of the financial and benevolent aspects of the work with the idea of securing continued public support. He stated that the total public contributions to the end of May 1916 amounted to almost exactly 100,000,000 francs; that the value of gifts of clothing amounted to over 15,000,000 francs: that, consequently, the public gifts to Belgium had averaged about 6,000,000

frances a month since the organisation of the Commission for Relief in Belgium, but that public subscriptions and sympathy were rapidly diminishing. He thought that these could only be stimulated together, and it seemed to him essentially necessary that public sympathy and public opinion should be again stirred in favour of Belgium, especially in America, and that more funds should be secured for the benevolent work in Belgium. In the first place, the strongest weapon of the Commission was the public sympathy and public opinion in favour of its work throughout the world. The Commission would be able to bring much greater pressure on the belligerents if it could show that the public contributions continued steadily, as this was the best measure of the degree of public interest. He therefore proposed that the Commission should base a new appeal for continued charitable support on the needs of the 600,000 to 700,000 destitute children in Belgium. Such an appeal, he thought, would receive a generous reception if properly organised. In view of the situation revealed by the investigations in Belgium, it appeared to be indispensable that new and extended efforts should be taken in behalf of the children and that special imports of food should be made to provide for the soup-canteens to be established in all the schools.

**A New Committee to organise the Children's Canteen Work.**—Francqui agreed that it was necessary, both from the financial and from the charitable point of view, to continue the campaign for funds abroad, and proposed that a special committee for the aid and protection of institutions for the aid of children should be formed to expend the income appropriated by the Comité National and the Commission for Relief in Belgium for this purpose. This new executive committee should be composed of Francqui, Janssens, De Wouters, Kellogg, Dr. Lucas, Jasper, Dr. Demmor, Dr. Bordet, Dr. Heger and Dr. Schloss. It was agreed that the Comité National should continue to collect gifts in Belgium and that the Commission for Relief in Belgium should make appeals abroad in the name of the destitute children of Belgium. All the funds coming into the hands of the Commission for Relief in Belgium and the Comité National in response to these appeals should be allocated through the above committee to the various institutions for child welfare. It was agreed also that so far as possible school canteens should be established throughout the whole of Belgium.

**A New Appeal on behalf of the Children.**—On his return to London, Hoover set energetically to work to organise this new appeal for funds to aid the children of Belgium. He also began to negotiate with the allied governments for the purpose of securing permission to make the increased food imports required to provision the new canteens. The appeal met with great response both in England and in America. The Rocky Mountain Club of New York, which had set aside \$500,000 to build a clubhouse, voted to contribute this sum to the Commission for the care of Belgian children instead of building their clubhouse. Another group of mining men of New York organised a corporation known as the 'Belgian Kiddies Limited,' and all the subscriptions for the stock of this corporation were turned over to the Commission. Representatives of the New York office organised or re-organised committees throughout the whole of the United States to assist in the work. It was under the immediate direction of Mr. Edgar Rickard, who was now in the New York office as assistant director. Many of the delegates of the Commission who had returned to America, such as Mr. Robert Arrowsmith, Mr. F. H. Chatfield, Mr. T. H. Stacey, Mr. John Iliff, and others, went about the country describing the situation in Belgium. It soon became evident that the Commission would derive considerable funds from the new appeal, but

before the program could be made effective, it would first be necessary to obtain from the allied governments permission to make the increased imports. Negotiations were therefore at once undertaken to secure this permission.

### NEGOTIATIONS FOR AN INCREASE IN SUBSIDIES AND SUPPLIES, AUGUST TO OCTOBER, 1916

The necessity for negotiating New Agreements with the Allies.—The program of shipments and the monthly subsidies, agreed upon in the summer of 1915, were to be in force for only one year and hence would come automatically to an end on September 1, 1916. It therefore became necessary in August 1916 for the Commission, supported by M. Francqui, to take up again with the allied governments the question of the continuation of the Commission's work for the third winter of the war. Nothing had yet come of the scheme to raise a loan in America, and, consequently, the Commission had still to look to subsidies from the allied governments for the major part of its finances.

In a letter to the Belgian Minister in London on August 24, 1916, Mr. Hoover outlined concisely the financial position of the Commission. He pointed out that the realised value of the subsidy actually received from the Belgian Government was £950,000 per month, while, because of the extraordinary rise in food prices, purchases of the program of imports already authorised would require over £1,700,000 a month. In addition, the Commission and the Comité National were seeking authorisation for increased import permits which, if obtained, would demand a further £300,000 per month. Thus the Commission, said Hoover, 'is in imperative need of an assured income of £2,000,000 per month, or the double of our present subsidy. The income from charity is erratic and uncertain. After the fall elections, we may perhaps, by increase of our American receipts, reach a total of say £100,000 a month. Our commercial exchange brings us in £25,000 to £30,000 a month, the whole of which is simply a margin of security. The following shows the cost of the program permitted by the allied governments:—

Commodity.	Quarterly quantities authorised by Allied Governments.	Cost per ton delivered to Belgium.	Total cost per quarter.
	Tons.	£	£
Wheat ... ..	162,000	20	3,240,000
Bacon ... ..	4,000	77	308,000
Lard ... ..	8,000	72	576,000
Maize ... ..	24,000	10	240,000
Beans and Peas ... ..	9,000	30	270,000
Rice ... ..	15,000	18	270,000
Yeast materials ... ..	3,000	13	39,000
Cocoa ... ..	1,000	98	98,000
Condensed Milk ... ..	1,500	50	75,000
		Cost per	£5,116,000
		month	£1,705,300

\* Interchangeable.



‘The following table shows the total cost of our deliveries into Belgium during quarter ending July 25, 1916 :—

Commodity.	Quarterly quantity authorised by Allied Governments.	Quantity delivered.	Expenditure.
	Tons.	Tons.	£
Wheat ... ..	162,000	164,187	2,488,802
Bacon ... ..	1,000	3,453	264,315
Lard ... ..	8,000	7,499	529,627
Maize ... ..	24,000	21	199
Rice ... ..	15,000	21,118	363,230
Peas and Beans ... ..	9,000	2,615	80,801
Yeast materials ... ..	3,000	1,931	22,500
Condensed Milk ... ..	1,500	881	43,167
			£3,742,174
		Cost per month	£1,247,391

\* Interchangeable.

‘It will be seen from this table that we did not deliver the full program in some particulars during this quarter, but with the shipping which we now have we shall, during the third quarter of the year, be able to deliver practically the whole program and we hope to continue it.

‘I may mention that the rise which has taken place in the cost of wheat during the last few weeks, due to the shortage in the American harvest, has increased the cost of the Belgian program by no less than £270,000 for this item alone, and the rise in the price of wheat has caused a rise to some extent in all subsidiary cereals.’

Hoover further said that he would make no suggestions with regard to the means of financing the Commission’s program until it had been first considered by the Belgian Government.

M. Franconi co-operated with Mr. Hoover in urging the necessity of an increase in the subsidies and in the quantity of supplies which the allied governments permitted the Commission to import. In a visit to London and Le Havre he used his influence to support the representations already made by the Commission. The matter was finally presented to the British and French Foreign Offices with a request for immediate action.

**Difficulties with the Foreign Office.**—A temporary set-back was experienced, however, when, on September 23, Lord Grey wrote the American Ambassador that the Foreign Office would postpone the consideration of Mr. Hoover’s request for an increased subsidy until an answer was received from the Germans to the letter transmitted through the American Ambassador on April 1, in which the British laid before the German authorities in Belgium an offer with regard to the conditions under which the British Government were willing to continue to allow goods to be exported from Belgium. This letter referred to the negotiations for the revival of Belgian industries which has been discussed in Chapter IX. No answer to this offer of the British Government was ever received from the Germans.

Hoover pointed out the urgency of the situation to Lord Eustace Percy, in a letter of September 26, and emphasised the fact that it was out of the question to again increase the importation of raw material into Belgium. As to the matter of exports, Hoover suggested

that non-contraband exports from Belgium should be permitted only on the condition that the whole of the money received in payment of these exports should be transferred to Belgium through the exchange department of the Commission for Relief in Belgium.

Mr. Hoover urged upon the Foreign Office the necessity of acting promptly on the requests for increases of food imports, independently of the question of industrial exports. He presented for the consideration of the Foreign Office a memorandum which had been drawn up during his visit to Brussels of September 14 to 21, 1916.

**The Situation as regards Native Products.**—While in Belgium he had made enquiry among the representatives of the Commission as to the native food outlook. The results he communicated to the patron Ministers in a letter of September 15; the chief points of which were: (1) that the potato crop would be 30 per cent. worse than that of the previous year and would be insufficient for the population; (2) that the crop of breadstuffs was 20 per cent. less than that of the previous year; (3) that the meat supply would be much less because of the shortage of fodder for the animals; (4) that the high price of all fats would make it impossible for the majority of the population to obtain a sufficient quantity from the indigenous products. As a general result of the food shortage, Hoover pointed out that the industrial classes already showed greatly decreased vitality, increased tuberculosis, and other signs of increasing weakness. In consequence of all this he declared that 'the imports of food must, during the winter, rise to much larger quantities than anything we have heretofore contemplated and this in face of the highest prices the world has ever known.'

On September 20 it was agreed by Mr. Hoover and the Comité National that it would be necessary during the coming winter to increase the bread-supply in order to provide an extra ration for the school soup-canteens and for the workmen. Consequently, the wheat supply for all Belgium would have to be increased from 64,000 to 75,000 tons per month. The yield of the native crop would be 2,000 tons per month less than in the previous year. The increased quantities proposed were to be obtained by augmenting the imports by 6,300 tons per month and by the arrangement effected by the Commission for Relief in Belgium with the German General Staff, by which the German authorities agreed to provide the population of the etapes with 12,300 tons per month, instead of 6,100 tons as in the previous year.

**Hoover's Statement of the Needs of Belgium.**—Mr. Hoover, on his return to London, presented to Lord Eustace Percy, on October 7, 1916, a long report on the food position in Belgium, together with recommendations of the Commission for an increase in the subsidies and in the program of imports. He pointed out the health conditions shown by Dr. Lucas's investigations, and emphasised the necessity of providing additional food for the working class and for the adolescent children. He emphasised the fact that this was particularly necessary because of the decrease in the quantities of the indigenous harvest of potatoes and breadstuffs, because the local supplies were seriously reduced and because the importations from Holland had practically ceased. Hoover gave a summary of the amount of food that would be available to the population from native sources. He estimated that there would not be more than 350 grammes of potatoes per day and per person in the territory of the General Government and not even that much in Northern France. The cereal harvest would provide not more than 175,000 tons. The total meat from the local sources was, according to Hoover's report, only about 3,500 tons per month for the whole of Belgium, or less than 17 grammes per day *per capita*. The price of 12 francs

per kilo put meat absolutely beyond the reach of three-fourths of the population. Butter had practically disappeared. There would be available about 4,000 tons of sugar per month for the whole of Belgium.

According to Mr. Hoover's estimates there would therefore be available for the civil population of Belgium, the following quantities of food monthly:—

NATIVE—							Tons Monthly.
Meat	..	..	..	..	..	..	3,500
Fats	..	..	..	..	..	..	1,000
Potatoes	..	..	..	..	..	..	75,000
Sugar	..	..	..	..	..	..	4,000
Wheat and Rye	..	..	..	..	..	..	30,000
IMPORTS—							
Wheat	..	..	..	..	..	..	54,000
Maize	..	..	..	..	..	..	8,000
Peas and Beans	..	..	..	..	..	..	3,000
Bacon and Lard	..	..	..	..	..	..	4,000
Rice	..	..	..	..	..	..	5,000
Cocoa	..	..	..	..	..	..	350
Condensed Milk	..	..	..	..	..	..	500

A Statistical Analysis of the Deficiency of the Available Ration.—<sup>c</sup> The following table shows :

- (a) The dietetic results of these totals ;  
 (b) The minimum dietetic requirements of the population after giving weight to partial unemployment and reduction of ' man power ' ; and  
 (c) The deficiency—

	(a)	(b)	(c)
	Grammes per diem.	Grammes per diem.	Grammes per diem.
Protein .. .. .	46	70	24
Fats .. .. .	42	50	8
Carbohydrates .. ..	328	410	82
Total calories .. ..	1,737	2,400	663

No doubt the poultry and sundry vegetables would add something to this total, but the amount would not be very important. If we adopt Professor Thompson's views of the proportion of these articles in the United Kingdom dietary and adapt them to Belgian conditions, it would amount to less than 150 calories *per diem per capita*. The deficiency of the available food-supplies, revealed by the above figures, represents a monthly shortage in :

Protein	..	..	..	..	..	5,400 tons
Fats	..	..	..	..	..	1,800 ..
Carbohydrates	..	..	..	..	..	18,450 ..

for which deficiency some combination of bacon, lard, preserved fish, peas, beans and wheat needs to be found.'

Mr. Hoover also pointed out that the 5,500,000 to 6,000,000 people who received food-rations from the Commission would find it impossible, for the most part, to purchase any of the native food, with the possible exception of potatoes and vegetables. The average

ration per day and *per capita* of this great majority of the Belgian people would be in consequence fully 25 per cent. below the minimum food standard. This is most graphically shown in the following table which was presented by Mr. Hoover in his report :—

Commodities.	GRAMMES PER DIEM PER CAPITA.				Calories.
	Ration.	Proteins.	Fats.	Carbo- hydrates.	
	Grammes.	Grammes.	Grammes.	Grammes.	
Bread ... ..	400	31·6	4·4	200	992
Potatoes ... ..	350	3·5	4·5	66·5	294
Bacon and Lard ... ..	22	0·8	19·5	—	185
Maize Products ... ..	27	1·2	0·3	22·4	98
Peas and Beans ... ..	22	5·2	0·4	12·7	78
Rice ... ..	28	0·2	0·1	21·8	100
Adopted minimum standard (as above) ...	849	42·5	29·2	323·4	1,747
(giving a shortage of ... ..)	—	70·0	50·0	410·0	2,400
	—	40 %	42 %	21 %	27 %

Hoover's proposal for Increasing the Rations of the Poor.—Mr. Hoover proposed to increase the ration of the people holding household cards by increasing the bread-ration to the working class and by extending the quantities of food distributed through soup-canteens. He proposed to provide a ration of 300 grammes of flour per day *per capita* to the whole population, with a supplement of 50 grammes per day to workers. This would require an import of wheat amounting to 58,000 or 59,000 tons per month. Mr. Hoover estimated that the number of people to be fed by the communal soup-kitchens was 1,700,000; that the number of babies cared for through the infant canteens was 120,000; and that the number of children who would participate in the distributions in the schools was at least 1,000,000. There would, therefore, be approximately 2,820,000 people whose ordinary ration must be further supplemented through the various kinds of soup-kitchens. To supply these soup-kitchens with rations, Hoover estimated that it would be necessary to have per month, in addition to the normal importations, approximately 850 tons of native meat, 1,700 tons of bacon and lard, 500 tons of cheese and 850 tons of preserved fish. Assuming that the adults fed by these soup-kitchens received the extra 50 grammes of flour, the total rations of this section of the population would then be equivalent to the following :—

Grammes per diem per capita.	Grammes of Protein.	Fats.	Carbohydrates.	Number of Calories.
940	54	52	358	2,145

Although this quantity would still be too low for adults, the large proportion of children who normally consumed much less than adults would liberate a considerable proportion in favour of the adults. To take care of the children, Hoover also proposed to import 500 tons of condensed milk and 350 tons of cocoa monthly. In the light of the considerations urged by Mr. Hoover in his reports, he made a recommendation that the import program be extended in accord with the following table :—

Commodities.	Present permitted importation in tons.	Additional required in tons.	Total.	@	Approximate cost £ Sterling.
Bacon and Lard ... ..	4,000	1,686	5,686	75	426,450
Peas and Beans ... ..	3,000	—	3,000	27	81,000
Cheese ... ..	—	500	500	110	55,000
Cocoa ... ..	350	—	350	95	33,250
Coffee ... ..	—	1,100	1,100	60	66,000
Fish (preserved) ... ..	—	850	850	40	34,000
Maize ... ..	8,000	—	8,000	11	88,000
Meat ... ..	—	500	500	55	27,500
Milk (condensed) ... ..	500	500	1,000	50	50,000
Rice ... ..	5,000	—	5,000	17	85,000
Soap ... ..	—	1,000	1,000	31	31,000
Wheat ... ..	54,000	5,000	59,000	18	1,062,000
Yeast materials ... ..	1,000	—	1,000	30	30,000
	75,850	11,186	86,986	—	£2,069,200

Of the whole cost of £2,069,200 monthly, Hoover said that about £350,000 was to be attributed to the proposed increase in imports, while the rise in prices was responsible for another £400,000.

Hoover explained that the Commission hoped to be able to obtain about £150,000 per month from charity and commercial exchange and would therefore need about £1,900,000 per month in subsidies, an increase of £900,000 a month over those received in 1915-16.

**Criticisms and Objections to the Proposed Increases.** Mr. Hoover could not, of course, expect that such a program would go through immediately, nor without much opposition and discussion, and, as a matter of fact, considerable difficulties were experienced in the course of the negotiations. At one time it was reported from France that the French Government had definitely refused an increased subsidy to the Belgian Government for Belgian relief purposes. Mr. Hoover, however, took up the matter through the Belgian Minister of Finance, to whom he sent a copy of his report, already extensively quoted.

Lord Eustace Percy, in a letter of October 16, made certain criticisms of Mr. Hoover's report, especially in regard to the estimates of population, the potato crop, and the cereals. He expressed the opinion that the crops of potatoes and cereals, and the amount of available native fats and meat, ought to be considerably greater than that reported by Mr. Hoover.

On October 16 Lord Grey wrote the diplomatic patrons of the Commission that before the Foreign Office took action on the request of Mr. Hoover for increased subsidies, it hoped to receive assurances that the Commission had organised such an inspection and control of foodstuffs in Belgium as would put a stop to the reported wholesale purchases and requisitions by the Germans and the other violations of the guarantees. 'The war has reached a most critical stage. The Central Powers are feeling more and more the need of food and labour, while, at the same time, the Commission for Relief in Belgium has been obliged to ask for increased capital drawn from the allied countries, in order to continue its operations and also for various increases in its rations. Under these conditions it would be very easy, for any ill-disposed persons in Belgium or any officials seeking a way to use the occupied territories to lighten the increased burdens of the Central Powers, to take action or connive at breaches of the guarantees of a kind which would endanger the whole work. The question of the control of native foodstuffs is one of the most important in

this connection, because demands for increases in the ration of imported foodstuffs, at a time when the Commission finds itself unable to give any adequate assurances or even any accurate information as to the methods and effect of the control which the German authorities are seeking to establish over native foodstuffs, could hardly, in the long run, meet with favourable consideration here.'

The Foreign Office grants conditionally increased imports.—Mr. Hoover, in a letter of October 20 to Lord Eustace Percy, answered the criticisms which Lord Eustace had made in his letter of October 16, and answered them so effectively that the Foreign Office decided to grant permission for a monthly increase of the importations into the whole of Belgium amounting to 5,000 tons of wheat, 1,000 tons of soap, and 2,350 tons of fat, or protein-producing foods, viz. : fish, bacon, lard, margarine, butter, meat and cheese.

These importations were to be subject to the following restrictions :—

'(1) Any fish bought may be bought from His Majesty's Government, and any other class of foodstuffs must be bought in Holland.

'(2) Out of the total amount, you should not import in any one month more than 750 tons of fats, ordinarily so called, viz., fat bacon, lard, margarine or butter, without special authorisation from us.

'(3) These increases are understood to be for the purpose of making up the necessary diet for the soup-kitchens and the needs of the children.'

Hoover objects to the conditions.—Mr. Hoover was not, however, altogether satisfied with the proposal thus made by the Foreign Office for the increase in imports. He therefore took up the matter again with the Foreign Office. He said that the situation in Belgium had become very much more critical since he had last seen Lord Eustace Percy and that therefore the Government, in their own interest, should deal liberally and largely in granting these permits. He emphasised the fact that the Commission must import the quantities of bacon and lard, cheese, preserved fish, meat, condensed milk and wheat mentioned in the first report to Lord Eustace Percy in order to provide for the needs of the soup-canteens about to be established.

In a second letter of October 26 to Lord Eustace Percy, Hoover said : 'We are absolutely convinced that the situation in Belgium is more critical than your associates have recognised.' It seemed to him a great mistake to limit the imports of fats to 750 tons monthly ; the minimum quantity of fats to be imported should be 1,400 tons a month and the total fat and protein-producing foods should be 3,000 tons instead of 2,250.

The Foreign Office yields to Hoover's representations.—The Foreign Office considered very sympathetically Mr. Hoover's representations, and finally decided that his arguments were unanswerable and that the Commission should be permitted to import the additional quantities of food requested by Mr. Hoover. He was therefore notified by the Foreign Office, on October 26, that the British Government agreed to the following increases in the imports into Belgium :—

Bacon and Lard	..	..	..	..	..	1,686	tons
Cheese	..	..	..	..	..	500	..
Preserved Fish	..	..	..	..	..	850	..
Meat	..	..	..	..	..	500	..
Condensed Milk	..	..	..	..	..	500	..
Coffee	..	..	..	..	..	1,100	..
Wheat	..	..	..	..	..	5,000	..
Soap (hard yellow soap of the same variety as now imported into Northern France, to be bought in the United Kingdom)	..	..	..	..	..	1,100	..

All of these increases, with the exception of coffee, wheat and soap, were to be especially reserved for the soup-kitchens and for the meals served the children in schools. The Foreign Office also stated that, if the additional supplies could not be procured in Holland, the Foreign Office would not object to the Commission procuring them elsewhere.

**Increased Subsidies granted by the Allies.**—Mr. Hoover's negotiations to secure increased financial support for the Commission were equally successful. On October 27, 1916, Mr. Hoover was informed that the Cabinet had decided to approve the increase of the subsidy for Belgian relief to £1,500,000 per month. It was agreed between the Belgian and British Governments that 'the conditions attached to the first joint loan be continued to the two subsequent loans; that out of the £1,000,000 left without special car-mark provision for such subsidy to the railway employees in Belgium as is necessary to prevent them working for the Germans shall be omitted in the present cases. Instead, His Majesty's Government must stipulate that the proceeds of any sale in the occupied territory of food-stuffs bought out of the loan shall not be appropriated to objects or organisations in such territory which are not covered by the German Government's guarantee given to the Commission for Relief in Belgium and accepted by His Majesty's Government as the basis for the continuation of the Commission's work.'

The reason for this condition was explained by Lord Grey in a letter of November 7 to the American Ambassador. The British Government, he said, wished that all the appropriations made by the Relief Commission in the occupied territory should be closely scrutinised to make sure that the guarantees of the German Government did apply to them in every particular. 'It is hardly necessary to point out that it is an essential feature in these guarantees that they are given to the Commission for Relief in Belgium, a neutral body, whose independent position enables it to enter into definite contractual relations to the belligerent governments, and not merely to the Comité National, or to other bodies which do not enjoy a similar independence. Consequently, no object or organisation can be regarded as properly protected by the guarantees unless the neutral Commission is a party to all the agreements and regulations affecting such project or organisation, and is also a party in its management and control.'

This reference referred to the negotiations which were at that time in progress arising out of the difficulties that had developed between the Commission and the Comité National in the matter of the administration of the service of inspection and control. These difficulties will be discussed more fully in Chapter XV, but one cannot fail to recognise, from the emphasis put by Lord Grey on the part of the Commission in control of the relief work, that the British Government recognised the Commission and the Commission alone as the responsible agent for the conduct of the Belgian relief.

**The Commission's Success in these Negotiations.**—At the end of October, therefore, the Commission had secured permission to increase its imports into Belgium from a total of 75,850 tons to a total of 86,986 tons. At the same time increases had been granted in the rations for Northern France, as a result of negotiations that will be related in the next chapter, which brought the imports to Northern France to a monthly total of 39,250 tons. The Commission, therefore, had increased its total monthly program of imports to 126,536 tons per month.

The Commission's efforts to secure increased subsidies to permit of the purchase of these quantities had been equally successful, through the efforts of Mr. Hoover. The subsidy for Belgium had been increased to £1,500,000 per month and that for France to a

similar sum. The Commission therefore was encharged with the obligation of expending a sum of more than £3,000,000 monthly during the third winter of its work. At this time there was but little indication of the events which would occur during that winter to change the whole basis of the Commission's work and to effect, at least temporarily, a tremendous reduction in the quantity of food actually delivered in Belgium. The new program had hardly been put into full operation at the beginning of the year 1917 when the whole situation of the Commission and of the Belgian relief problem was suddenly changed by the rupture of diplomatic relations between the United States and Germany.

#### STATISTICAL SUMMARY OF THE SECOND YEAR'S WORK.

**The Growth of the Commission's Work.**—Nothing indicates more clearly the growth and development of the work of the Commission in its second year (October 1915—October 1916) than the simple statistics of the quantities of food shipped to Belgium, the moneys expended, and the relief actually distributed. The totals for the first year had been very large, but these were far surpassed by the totals for the second year. At the same time the work had expanded in many ways. New and important institutions and measures had been put into operation for the relief of destitution and the prevention of misery. New and far-reaching guarantees had been obtained from the Germans, and an efficient check on the enforcement of the guarantees had been provided. The Commission had grown out of its embryo organisation, with its many natural deficiencies, into a larger, more compact and more smoothly running organisation. During the first year of work the feeling had prevailed that the Commission would very soon suspend its operations, and the work consequently exhibited the characteristics of an organisation devised and operated as a temporary makeshift. But in the second year this tendency had disappeared completely. The Commission had been put upon a permanent basis. Its organisation had been revised on the basis of a possible indefinite continuation of its work. It had perfected its machinery and had become a great institution operating as if it expected to continue perpetually. The wisdom of this course has been proved by the later developments of the war. The Commission has been enabled to continue its philanthropic work in spite of all difficulties and obstacles, chiefly because of the efficiency and experience gained in the first two years of work, and this in spite of the outbreak of war between the United States and Germany, and the important readjustments in the carrying on of the relief work that had to be in consequence of this change in the international situation.

**The increase in Food Shipments.**—From October 31, 1914, to October 31, 1915, 186 full cargoes averaging 4,637 tons each and 308 part cargoes averaging 209 tons each had been delivered by the Commission in Rotterdam. From October 31, 1915, to October 31, 1916, 207 full cargoes averaging 5,250 tons each and 575 part cargoes averaging 378 tons each were delivered in Rotterdam. For the two years there were therefore a total of 393 full cargoes averaging 4,980 tons each and 823 cross Channel part cargoes averaging 315 tons each. The total number of tons of food delivered at Rotterdam in the first year was 983,708; in the second year 1,300,322. The monthly average in the first year had been about 15.5 full cargoes with 87,976 tons of food; in the second year it was about 17.5 full cargoes with



108,360 tons of food, representing an increase of about 33 per cent. The following tables show the quantities of the various food supplies delivered at Rotterdam in each of the first two years of the work of the Commission :—

	Quantities in tons of 1,000 kilos.		
	First year.	Second year.	Total.
Wheat .. .. .	526,329	904,551	1,430,880
Flour .. .. .	153,859	6,515	160,374
Meat, Bacon, Lard .. .. .	30,070	73,403	103,473
Maize .. .. .	119,451	135,141	254,592
Rice .. .. .	74,358	97,118	171,476
Peas and Beans .. .. .	32,833	21,681	54,514
Coffee .. .. .	1,093	12,982	14,075
Fish .. .. .	—	1,007	1,007
Milk .. .. .	3,064	14,086	17,150
Soap .. .. .	124	8,615	8,739
Sugar .. .. .	81	13,801	13,882
Potatoes .. .. .	28,312	—	28,312
Sundry Foodstuffs .. .. .	17,488	1,444	18,932
Yeast Materials .. .. .	3,387	7,149	10,536
Clothing and Miscellaneous.. .. .	3,249	2,604	5,853
Benzine, Oil, Grease.. .. .	110	225	335
Totals .. .. .	983,808	1,300,322	2,284,130
Purchased .. .. .	890,695	1,287,067	2,177,762
Gifts in Kind .. .. .	93,113	13,255	106,368

**Expenditures of the Commission.**—The expenditures of the Commission were naturally very much greater in the second year than the first. Not only were the importations considerably increased, but the prices for all commodities purchased were higher as a result of the general rise in food prices throughout the world. The following table gives the amounts of the subsidies received by the Commission during these first two years of work :—

	TABLE OF SUBSIDIES RECEIVED BY THE COMMISSION.							
	For Belgium.			For Northern France.				
	£	s.	d.	francs.	£	s.	d.	francs.
1st year	10,860,300	15	8	275 851,631.90	3,554,455	1	7	95,000,000
2nd year	11,854,270	11	5	301,098,471.51	10,343,759	9	9	290,000,000
Total..	22,714,571	7	1	576,950,103.41	13,898,214	11	4	385,000,000
				£				francs.
Grand Totals.—1st year	..			14,414,755	17	3		370,851,631.90
2nd year	..			22,198,030	1	2		591,098,471.51
				36,612,785	18	5		961,950,103.41

## BENEVOLENT FUND.—OCTOBER 31, 1914—OCTOBER 31, 1916.

(Approximate Figures.)

	1914-15	1915-16	1914-16
<b>CASH DONATIONS.</b>			
British Empire .. .. .	£1,500,000	£915,000	£2,415,000
U.S.A. .. .. .	70,000	210,000	280,000
Miscellaneous .. .. .	145,000	25,000	170,000
<b>Totals .. .. .</b>	<b>£1,715,000</b>	<b>£1,150,000</b>	<b>£2,865,000</b>
<b>DONATIONS OF FOOD.</b>			
British Empire .. .. .	£285,000	£60,000	£345,000
U.S.A. .. .. .	940,000	125,000	1,065,000
Miscellaneous .. .. .	40,000	5,000	45,000
<b>Totals .. .. .</b>	<b>£1,265,000</b>	<b>£190,000</b>	<b>£1,455,000</b>
<b>DONATIONS OF CLOTHING.</b>			
British Empire .. .. .	£110,000	£10,000	£120,000
U.S.A. .. .. .	385,000	110,000	495,000
Miscellaneous .. .. .	5,000	—	5,000
<b>Totals .. .. .</b>	<b>£500,000</b>	<b>£120,000</b>	<b>£620,000</b>
<b>GRAND TOTALS.</b>			
British Empire .. .. .	£1,895,000	£985,000	£2,880,000
U.S.A. .. .. .	1,395,000	445,000	1,840,000
Miscellaneous .. .. .	190,000	30,000	220,000
<b>Totals .. .. .</b>	<b>£3,480,000</b>	<b>£1,460,000</b>	<b>£4,940,000</b>
„ .. .. .	\$17,000,000	\$7,000,000	\$24,000,000
„ .. .. .	Frs. 93,500,000	Frs. 38,500,000	Frs. 132,000,000

## SUMS EXPENDED BY THE BENEVOLENT DEPARTMENT.

	1914-15	1915-16	1914-16
OBJECT.	£	£	£
Ordinary Relief .. .. .	1,670,000	2,430,000	4,100,000
Clothing Department .. .. .	940,000	815,000	1,755,000
Temporary Shelters .. .. .	80,000	30,000	110,000
Relief to Children .. .. .	30,000	145,000	175,000
Agricultural Relief .. .. .	33,000	32,000	65,000
Lacemakers .. .. .	20,000	30,000	50,000
Refugees .. .. .	15,000	57,000	72,000
Foreigners in Need .. .. .	25,000	45,000	70,000
To Belgians in Holland and France	75,000	—	75,000
Doctors and Pharmacists .. .. .	6,300	17,800	24,100
Artists .. .. .	16,400	33,600	50,000

	£	£	£
Prisoners of War .. .. .	4,000	6,000	10,000
Dispossessed .. .. .	3,000	12,000	15,000
War Cripples .. .. .	5,000	—	—
Anti-Tuberculosis League .. .. .	2,800	24,500	27,300
Restoration of Church .. .. .	5,000	3,000	8,000
Cardinal Mercier's Priest Fund .. .. .	3,600	10,100	13,700
Antwerp Workshops .. .. .	18,000	23,000	41,000
Gifts to Municipalities .. .. .	12,000	—	12,000
Sundry .. .. .	4,000	21,000	25,000
Economic Restaurants .. .. .	—	18,000	18,000
Totals to General Committees	260,000	365,000	625,000
Financial Aid .. .. .	2,000	20,000	22,000
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
Totals expended .. .. .	3,230,100	4,138,000	7,368,100
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>

## CHAPTER XIII

## THE WORK IN NORTHERN FRANCE DURING 1916

NEGOTIATIONS FOR AN INCREASE IN THE RATIONS IN NORTHERN  
FRANCE, JANUARY-MAY 1916

**Problems of the Relief Work in Northern France.**—The work of the Commission in Northern France went on during 1916 with less interruption and friction than was encountered in Belgium. The ration decided upon in September 1915 was delivered with fair regularity, except for the short intervals when the Commission's imports were cut down. This ration was soon discovered to be insufficient to maintain the population, however, because of the practical non-existence of native foods. The Commission realised that it was imperative for the welfare of the population that the ration of imported foods should be increased. Negotiations were consequently begun in January 1916 to secure the authorisation to make the additional imports necessary for a larger ration.

Toward the end of 1915 the Commission found itself becoming involved in ever greater difficulties as a result of the constant criticism and opposition of the English and French military authorities, who contended that the Germans were benefiting largely from the relief supplies. The repeated demands for new restrictions from these sources became so annoying that the Commission at last decided that the time had come when a thorough understanding must be reached with the British and French Governments. In connection with the negotiations for increased rations an effort was therefore made to establish closer relations with the French authorities and to provide for a more satisfactory basis for the work of the Commission in occupied France.

**The Commission's Memorandum on its work in Northern France.**—To this end a memorandum was drawn up by Mr. Hoover and M. Louis Chevrillon, the French representative of the Commission, describing in detail the purposes, methods and accomplishments of the relief bodies. A special review was made of the work done in Northern France since April 1915. It was pointed out that food to the value of approximately 70,000,000 francs had been delivered in the French districts by October 31, 1915, and that the balance of 40,000,000 francs of the total of 110,000,000 francs advanced to the Commission through the Belgian Government for the financing of the work in Northern France had been paid for goods then in transit to Northern France. Because of the shipping difficulties it was necessary for the Commission at all times to have two months' supplies *en route*. The memorandum concluded with the statement that, as the Commission feels that it is necessary to reconsider the whole organisation and future of the work, it desires an understanding with the allied governments on the following essential points: (1) the future importations and the finance thereof; (2) the organisation in Northern France.

**The New Ration Program proposed.**—In order to present more clearly the problem it had to face, the Commission presented the following program of food-supplies as being the minimum quantities that would provide the necessities of life for the 2,200,000 people of Northern France :—

Commodity Imports.	PROPOSED NEW RATION.		Total tons per month.	Total Cost.	
	Grammes per day per person.	Kilos per month per person.		Cost per kilo. Frs.	Frs.
<b>IMPORTS.</b>					
Flour ... ..	200	6.0	16,000 (Wheat)	0.33	5,280,000
Lard ... ..	33	1.0	2,200	1.70	3,740,000
Bacon ... ..	25	0.75	1,650	2.00	3,300,000
Rice ... ..	66	2.0	4,400	0.375	1,650,000
Condensed Milk	25	0.75	1,650	1.25	2,062,000
Beans and Lentils	25	0.75	1,650	0.55	907,500
Sugar ... ..	20	0.60	1,320	0.625	825,000
Coffee ... ..	16.5	0.50	1,100	1.325	1,457,000
Salt ... ..	20	0.60	1,320	0.085	112,200
Soap ... ..	16.5	0.50	1,100	0.625	687,500
Potatoes ... ..	200	6.0	13,200	0.15	1,980,000
Cerealine ... ..	16.5	0.50	2,200 (Maize)	0.30	660,000
Salad Oil ... ..	5.0	0.15	330	1.15	379,000
Cotton Oil ... ..					
Peanut Oil ... ..					
Carbide ... ..	—	—	500	1.875	937,500
<b>DOMESTIC SUPPLIES</b>					
(By agreement with the Germans).					
Flour ... ..	100.0	—	—	—	—
Potatoes ... ..	200.0	—	—	—	—
	968.5	—	—	—	Frs. 23,977,700

The Commission had drawn up this program after a very thorough study of the situation in France, and considered that the quantities mentioned were the minimum which would maintain the population in health. The population would, of course, have desired an even larger supply, but the Commission reported that because of the shipping conditions it felt it could not undertake to carry out a larger program. In the past it had been impossible to deliver the whole program, because of unexpected shortages in shipments, losses of ships and other uncontrollable reasons, but the Commission believed it could import regularly the above quantities and therefore asked for permission to import them to Rotterdam and for the assurance of a subsidy of 24,000,000 francs per month.

**The Agreement desired by the Commission.**—In order to facilitate the work, the Commission requested a confirmation by the French Government, or by the English Government acting on its behalf, of the following provisions :—

(1) That the method of accounting and disposal of supplies as set out above is upon a basis satisfactory to the allied governments ; that, inasmuch as the Commission is an entirely humanitarian institution, working without profit, it has no responsibility on its members, and should peace come while the work is still in progress the French

institutions will take over all foodstuffs in transit at cost and will assume the liabilities outstanding; furthermore, that while the Commission has set up every safeguard it can devise as to accounting and auditing, the individual members shall not be held responsible for any failure in this matter.

'(2) The Commission desires that it should be definitely understood that all French committees and their membership are entirely subject to the direction of the Commission and its representatives, and hold their appointment and membership entirely subject to the will of the Commission, and that no independent action of any character by any member of any such committee shall be taken without the previous express approval of the Commission. This is vitally necessary, as all negotiations with the governments involved must be centralised in the Commission or absolute chaos will ensue.'

**Competition in the work in Northern France.**—This last condition had been made necessary by the fact that various independent bodies in France had been conducting negotiations with the French Government to secure increased supplies for the population of the invaded districts. Efforts were still being made in France to secure independent imports to Northern France through a Swiss intermediary independent of the Commission. Many of the cities of Northern France had raised special funds of their own, or secured loans in France, which they wished to have devoted to the purchase of foodstuffs for their particular communities in addition to and independent of the supplies imported by the Commission. The Commission, however, believed that all imports for France should be made through its agency, as it possessed the most extensive organisation for food purchases and distribution and could alone provide the guarantees that the food imported did not reach the Germans. If there were to be several independent bodies, each shipping food to Northern France, the problem of control would be made infinitely more difficult. The Commission therefore wished to secure official confirmation from the French Government of its work and wished to avoid competing with other relief agencies such as those which French committees were seeking to organise in Switzerland and Holland.

**The Action of the British Foreign Office.**—Lord Eustace Percy, in a letter of January 27, 1916, announced that the Foreign Office approved the general financial and other principles set forth in the memorandum as a basis for the Commission's work. He wrote that the Foreign Office could not at the moment definitely extend this approval to the program of imports embodied in the memorandum, but that the Commission would be informed later of any action taken on this matter. He closed his letter with the statement that: 'We shall conclude, unless we hear to the contrary, that your organisation in Northern France will be conducted in the future on the lines set forth in this memorandum without material alteration.'

During the negotiations for the increased ration the Commission had encountered new difficulties as a result of criticisms of the method of distribution in Belgium. As related in Chapter X, the British Government in December 1915 ordered the Commission to cease shipments of lard and bacon both to Belgium and to Northern France. In January Mr. Hoover had been informed that until further notice he could resume these shipments at the temporary rate of 3,850 tons per month for Northern France. On February 23, when the Foreign Office fixed the monthly quantities the Commission would be allowed to import, the program for Northern France as well as for Belgium was considerably reduced. The program laid down by the Foreign Office was as follows:—

## Program of Monthly Imports for Northern France

Commodity.	Quantity requested (in ton of 1,000 kilos).	Quantity fixed, Feb. 23, 1916.
Wheat .. .. .	16,000	16,000
Bacon and Lard .. .. .	3,850	1,600
Rice .. .. .	4,400	2,200
Condensed Milk .. .. .	1,650	1,650
Beans and Peas .. .. .	1,650	1,650
Maize .. .. .	2,200	2,200
Sugar .. .. .	1,320	1,320
Coffee .. .. .	1,100	1,100
Salt .. .. .	1,320	1,320
Soap .. .. .	1,100	1,100
Potatoes .. .. .	13,200	—
Salad Oils .. .. .	330	—
Carbide .. .. .	500	—
Preserved Meat .. .. .	1,000	—
Preserved Fish .. .. .	300	—

The Commission's renewed effort to secure Increased Imports.—The reductions in the permitted quantities of bacon and lard and of rice would result, as the Commission knew, in the greatest hardships for the people of France. Mr. Hoover and his associates, therefore, were unwilling to accept the program laid down, and set to work at once to attempt to make out so strong a case for the necessity of the increases asked for as to compel the Foreign Office to reconsider its decision.

Even before the Commission was officially informed of the reductions to be made in its program for Northern France it had begun to prepare its campaign. In order to secure the strongest possible backing from the French Government, Mr. Hoover decided to go personally to Paris to explain the whole situation to the highest authorities, to ask their approval of the agreement proposed in the memorandum referred to above, and to undertake to win over their hearty support. Some difficulty had been experienced in getting the approval of the French authorities to the principles laid down in the memorandum. This was partly due to political complications in France. Senator Tournon and M. Gentillez, who had taken a very prominent part in the original negotiations for the work in Northern France, had believed that the work had been undertaken entirely at their instigation. Senator Tournon had previously conducted a series of negotiations, beginning in February 1915, to obtain relief for Northern France through Switzerland, and he considered himself and M. Guerin to be the initiators of the work of relief in the invaded departments. He therefore objected temporarily to giving to the Commission complete control over relief activities in Northern France.\*

Hoover's Negotiations with the French Authorities.—Hoover arrived in Paris on February 10, 1916, and immediately began, in a series of conferences with various officials, to reach a solution of the problem before him. He had a conference on the morning of his arrival with the delegate of the French General Staff at the War Ministry, who was especially charged with controlling the Commission's work, and discussed with him the

\* Letter of Senator E. Tournon to M. Louis Chevillon, January 17, 1916.

general attitude of the French staff toward the relief work. The French officer suggested that it would be advisable for Hoover to meet some of the chief officials of the French General Staff and said that he would arrange an interview for Hoover. On the same day Hoover and Chevrillon had a conference with an official of the Foreign Office, who was at first not very receptive and seemed inclined to oppose Hoover's proposals, but he seemed convinced by Hoover's statements and at the end of the interview appeared to be quite satisfied. He agreed that the best way for Hoover to secure favourable consideration of his proposals would be to meet with the General Staff and the Prime Minister. On the same afternoon, February 10, Hoover had an interview with the Under-Secretary of the Department of Commerce, who strongly supported the Commission's plan of ravitaillement, and said that he would intercede with the Minister of Commerce to secure his approval of Hoover's plans. The Under-Secretary of the Department of Marine informed Hoover that the work of the Commission had his unqualified support and said he would arrange a meeting with the Prime Minister, in order to attempt to secure full recognition for the Commission's work and to find some way for settling the shipping problem.

On the following day Hoover called on the Ministers of Labour and of Public Works and urged upon them the importance of the Commission's work. Both assured Mr. Hoover that they needed no further conviction as to the importance of the work and listened sympathetically to his statement of the Commission's difficulties.

**Hoover's Meeting with M. Guerin.**—On Saturday, February 12, Hoover had a meeting with M. Guerin of Lille, who was in Paris at the time. Hoover discussed the whole situation with him and protested energetically against his independent negotiations with the Germans and against the attempt to provide more than one agency for the provisioning of the population of Northern France. Guerin had been rather actively engaged, with the support of Senator Touron, in attempting to carry through negotiations to this end, but Hoover objected, pointing out that this would complicate and embarrass the whole work of provisioning the civil population in the occupied parts, as it would make an adequate control of the imports impossible.

The same afternoon Hoover met with the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs and an official of the Finance Department. He explained to the latter, particularly, that it was necessary that the French Government should take quite a new attitude to the Commission, that they should not be content with saying: 'We do not object to the work of the Commission,' but should rather take the attitude that 'we insist' that this work should go on. The official of the Finance Department agreed that by one means or another the continuance of the Commission's work must be assured.

**The visit to the French Headquarters.**—On Sunday the 13, Hoover and Chevrillon were taken to the general headquarters. There they discussed with the competent officers the whole organisation of the Commission and the problems of its work in the invaded provinces. The officers agreed that the principle of a minimum food-supply sufficient to supplement the native supplies must be maintained, but they were strongly insistent that the food introduced should be the very minimum that would suffice. Hoover went over with them all the reports of German requisitions which they had accumulated against the Commission. Before he left they were somewhat reassured as to the control exercised by the Commission over its supplies. At the conclusion of the interview Hoover pointed out how absurd it seemed to the Commission that it should be compelled to be constantly engaged in a sort of trench warfare with the French and English General Staffs, in view



of the fact that the Commission's only interest was to secure the imports absolutely necessary to preserve the lives of the French people in the occupied territories. Hoover said he would be delighted to surrender his task and let the military authorities do the work themselves if they thought they could do better. The Commission, he said, was always fighting the same sort of battle with the German staff over native food, and he and his colleagues were getting very, very tired and worn out by the constant friction on both sides. This frank statement of Hoover's made a very favourable impression and he went away convinced that in the future he would have better co-operation from the French military authorities.

**Hoover's meeting with the President of France.**—On February 14 Hoover was received by the President of France at the Elysée. The President welcomed Hoover with the statement that he had asked him to call to express to him the appreciation and admiration of the French people for the work which the Commission was doing on behalf of their unfortunate fellow-countrymen of the Northern departments. He said that he had kept personally in touch with the work and was filled with admiration for the efficiency and ability with which it had been administered; that he realised that it had now become an enormous enterprise and one of the greatest complexity. He fully understood, he said, the pressure upon the Commission from the people of the invaded regions to secure an increase of supplies and the still greater pressure put upon the Commission by the allied governments to reduce the supplies; and also the difficulties in which the Commission was constantly involved with the Germans in its efforts to protect the native food-supply. No one expected the Commission, he said, to reach the ideal in any of these directions.

**Hoover's explanations of the Commission's Problems.**—Hoover informed the President that the sole desire of the Commission was to keep the population alive and in health until the war was over and that this meant a great deal of privation, especially to those classes who had always had more than enough and were inclined to complain. He explained the embarrassment of the Commission because of the lack of shipping to move its supplies and emphasised the fact that a more direct support of the Commission by the French Government would be of the greatest assistance.

The President replied that the Council of Ministers had already fully discussed this matter and made direct representations to the British Government in the endeavour to find a solution for the Commission of its shipping and other difficulties.

M. Chevrillon pointed out to the President the vast military and political importance of maintaining the food-supplies for the people of the French occupied districts. He said that this phase of the question was not one for discussion with a neutral; that Hoover's attitude was wholly a humanitarian one; but that in addition, from the French point of view, there were other weighty factors which must not be overlooked. The President replied that he fully realised the importance of these phases of the matter; that they had been thoroughly discussed by the Ministry; that the humanitarian aspect must, of course, in the end dominate all questions; that the French people were fighting for their existence and that the existence of the French nation embraced also the two and a half million in the invaded districts.

At the conclusion of the interview President Poincaré rose and stated impressively to Hoover that he wished to convey to him and his associates the thanks of the French Republic.

**The meeting of the Senators and Deputies from the Occupied Districts.**—On February 13 Hoover had addressed a letter to M. Touron, explaining the difficulties under

which the Commission was working and asking for the support of senators and deputies from the invaded districts of Northern France. He pointed out that if the Commission could secure better support from the French Government it would greatly facilitate its work. Senator Touron replied, on February 15, assuring Hoover that he was in complete agreement with the program of the Commission for Northern France. He added that a meeting of senators and deputies of the north, which M. Guerin had attended, had been held on the morning of the 15; that they had decided unanimously to use their influence with the French Government in order to secure from it the necessary support for the Commission; and that on Saturday the representatives of the invaded provinces would have a meeting with the Ministers to discuss the best means of giving support to the Commission.

**The Results obtained in these Negotiations.**—As a result of these negotiations in Paris the French Government was given a much clearer understanding of the work of the Commission than they had previously had. Thereafter the French Government consistently supported the Commission in all of its negotiations. Whenever Mr. Hoover found himself in difficulties in London or at Le Havre he soon learned that he could always count upon the full and unquestioned backing of the French Government. This was one of the great sources of satisfaction to Mr. Hoover in his work. Unquestionably this happy result was largely due to Mr. Hoover's personal intervention and interviews with the various officials of the French Government. The French authorities had come to know Mr. Hoover personally and had been impressed by his sincerity and ability. In later negotiations they had but a few minor criticisms to make of the Commission's work, as they realised that Mr. Hoover and his associates were using their best efforts to secure the observance of the guarantees in Belgium and Northern France and to keep the civil population provided with a sufficient ration. These two ends were identical with those which the French Government desired to obtain.

When Mr. Hoover returned to London he knew that he had the full support of the French Government and that the representations of the Commission to the Foreign Office to secure increased supplies for Northern France would be effectively endorsed by the Quai d'Orsay. He immediately presented to the Foreign Office, early in March, the urgent necessity of increasing the ration in Northern France. The Foreign Office, however, declined to take any definite action until the Germans had given the guarantees demanded in the note of December 31, 1915. Hoover therefore decided to wait until the negotiations described in Chapter X could be successfully completed before making new representations for an increase of the imports to Northern France.

**Hoover's Visit to Northern France, March 1916.**—In order to gain a clear idea of the exact situation prevailing in Northern France, Mr. Hoover decided that during his visit to Belgium in connection with the negotiations referred to above he would visit personally the more important regions in France. Accordingly, on March 28, he left Brussels for Valenciennes accompanied by several German officers and by the local American delegates. In Valenciennes he met the heads of the district committees and discussed with them the general situation. He was informed that potatoes and meat had entirely disappeared. All the meat shops were closed and in the few grocery stores that remained open the shelves were absolutely bare, or filled only with empty packages and tins. The same day Hoover went on to Lille and found the situation there even worse than in Valenciennes. There was no meat, no potatoes and practically no supplies of any sort except those imported by the Commission. The American representatives went with Hoover

about the city from restaurant to restaurant to see if it would be possible to get any sort of a meal. They found that the only thing that could be served them was bread and coffee, both of which articles came from the stores imported by the Commission. In one restaurant they were told they could have a chicken for 20 francs. In Tourcoing and Roubaix, industrial cities to the north of Lille, Hoover found practically the same conditions existing.

**Conditions in the Lille District.**—In the course of the visit to these French towns Hoover received numerous petitions from the local committees for increases in the food ration. Everywhere he was told the same story. Practically the only food available to the people was that imported by the Commission and the ration of 100 grammes of flour received from the Germans. This provided an altogether too small quantity of food to maintain life and health. In the most graphic terms, and yet without a note of complaint, the district committees in France described their needs to Hoover and asked him if it would not be possible to increase the importations of the Commission. At Lille Mr. Hoover was shown that the mortality had increased by 30 per cent. over the previous year; that the number of births in 1915 was only 40 per cent. of that of 1914; and that in the case of elderly people the mortality had increased by 30 per cent. Consequently, as the general secretary of the Lille committee wrote: 'It is indispensable to increase the quantities of the various products actually supplied by the Commission. We present the most pressing appeal as regards milk. The quantities at our disposal are very inadequate and we beg the Commission for Relief in Belgium to come to our aid to save our infants and not to precipitate our aged into their tombs. We also request the Commission for Relief in Belgium to assist us in procuring other indispensable products, such as potatoes, fish, meat, eggs. All individual provisioning is suppressed and only the committee can supply these foodstuffs. We insist upon this point, that the local resources, even in normal times insufficient to supply our industrial population, are completely exhausted. Salvation can only come to us through the Commission for Relief in Belgium. Excuse our persistence, but we deem the situation very alarming. Our solicitations are not dictated by the desire to guard against a contingency more or less distant, but spring from our actual situation; we request energetic and prompt assistance.'

**Hoover's Proposals to the German Headquarters.**—Mr. Hoover, realising the validity of this appeal from the population in Northern France, immediately set about attempting to bring about an amelioration of the situation. He knew that if he could secure guarantees from the German authorities giving adequate protection to French native produce, he would be able to secure more favourable consideration from the allied governments of a proposal for an increase in the quantities to be shipped by the Commission to France. On April 1 therefore he wrote Major von Kessler at the General Headquarters in regard to the question of native food-supplies in Northern France, such as cattle, milk, butter, chickens, eggs, rabbits, etc. He pointed out that the native supplies had diminished almost to the point of exhaustion; that while the actual amount of food available was of no very great importance from a military point of view, it was of the greatest importance to the civilian population, as the indispensable supplement to the ration which the Commission could import. Hoover declared that the continued and increased requisitions had both diminished the amount of food available to the population and aroused the opposition of the Allies to any request of the Commission for an increase in imports. He said that the matter was only of indirect interest to the Commission, but that he was extremely keen to avoid any possible criticism that the Commission's operations were degenerating into a replace-

ment by importation of the native supplies seized by the occupying army. He stated that the Commission desired to increase its imports of meat, bacon, lard, milk and other supplies, but that it was improbable that this would be permitted unless the requisitions of food-stuffs in France was abandoned and its purchase by the Germans limited to occasional purchases by individual soldiers. Mr. Hoover said that he recognised and appreciated the efforts the German authorities had made to assist in the ravitaillement of this population and added that any further concessions on their part would have not only very great practical value, but considerable sentimental usefulness by influencing neutral opinion.

Without waiting for a reply from von Kessler, Hoover returned directly to London. By this time the whole series of negotiations to secure the protection of Belgian native food had reached its culmination and the Commission had been assured that the guarantees known as the April guarantees would be put in force at once by the Governor-General. Mr. Hoover therefore hoped that the general staff might make similar concessions in France.

**New Representations to the Allies for an Increased Ration in France.**—Immediately on his return to London, Hoover made new representations to the Foreign Office to permit an increase in the imports both for Belgium and for France. He asked that the Commission's program for Northern France should be increased by the addition of 3,300 tons of flour per month, and the doubling of the quantities of 1,600 tons of bacon and lard and 2,200 tons of rice which had been provided by the Foreign Office in its note of February 23, 1916. This would make a total increase in the daily ration of 108 grammes, representing a calorific value of 450. In a letter to Lord Eustace Percy, on April 5, Hoover described his visit to Northern France and stated that it was his conviction that unless the Commission could increase its imports to France the result would be very disastrous. The old ration was not sufficient to support life. He said in conclusion: 'I feel my entire inability to draw for you an adequate picture of the unutterable depression and despair of these people. We are the only link to their kindred and their allies and we are thus their only mouthpiece by which they may express to you their prayer for more help. My colleagues and myself feel that when the result of our representation last month was a reduction in their food instead of an increase as pleaded for, we have to-day to recognise that we have but proved our incapacity as their advocates.

'The Allies have not fought this war, nor do they intend to fight it, on the basis of abandonment of solicitude for the helpless; yet we, who for over a year have been ceaselessly endeavouring to alleviate this mass of misery, are now forced to appear as an instrument of torture, since we must daily refuse the pleadings of people, whose sufferings are yet to be told, in terms reflecting the neglect for which we are now daily blamed.'

**The Increases for Northern France authorised.**—After a considerable amount of negotiation with the allied governments, Hoover was informed that the Commission would be permitted to increase its shipments to Northern France. This increase was however practically made dependent upon the contingency of the Commission's securing a guarantee from the German authorities that a ration of 200 grammes of potatoes per day and *per capita* should be delivered by the German authorities to the French population. This amount would have required approximately 12,000 tons of potatoes per month for the population of the North of France, or some 42,000 tons in all, to provide the ration until the new harvest. It was estimated by the Commission that there was 10,000 tons then

in France and that 12,000 tons more could be secured from Holland ; that therefore only 20,000 tons need be provided by Germany.

**The Germans agree to provide a Ration of Potatoes.**—During the time that these negotiations were in progress the whole of the Commission's existence seemed for a time to be hanging in the balance, for this was the period of the interchange of notes between the United States and Germany which followed the torpedoing of the 'Sussex.' The Commission continued its negotiations, however, and during the very week of April in which Ambassador Gerard was summoned to Charleville to confer with the Emperor the question of the potato ration was taken up by the Brussels office of the Commission with General Zoellner, chief of staff of the general quartermaster. General Zoellner, when given an explanation of the situation, said that he hoped that the Germans would be able to provide the potatoes and that they in any case would do their best to deliver the full 200 grammes to the people of the French districts. The Commission therefore decided to at once increase the ration of bread, of rice, and of bacon and lard to the extent permitted by the Allies.

The first series of negotiations in 1916 for an increase in the French ration had thus been completely successful. The allied governments had given permission for increased shipments and the German army headquarters had been induced to add to the ration by providing 200 grammes of potatoes per person per day. As usual, however, this series of negotiations had hardly concluded when it became necessary to begin another and go over much the same ground again. Early in the spring Mr. Hoover received intimation that the Allies would demand that part or all of the harvest in France be turned over to the Commission to distribute to the civil population. The Commission made use of this intimation to fortify its own position. The demand of the Allies was used very diplomatically but effectively enough to secure concessions from the Germans. The Commission thereupon turned upon the Allies and used these concessions as a means of securing permits for increased shipments to Northern France and sufficient increase in the subsidies to provide for the purchase of these increased quantities.

The story of this series of negotiations will be told in a later section. It is interesting at this point to digress for a moment and consider some of the interesting developments in Northern France during the spring and summer of 1916.

## THE DEPORTATIONS FROM LILLE

**The Question of Forced Labour in the Occupied Territories.**—In April 1916 there occurred an incident in Northern France which involved the Commission for a moment in the maelstrom of the controversies of the war and compelled it to take a definite stand against action taken by the Germans toward the French population, which only indirectly concerned the Commission. This was the incident of the deportations from the district about Lille, which aroused such a storm of protest in the whole of the civilised world when the facts ultimately became known.

From the beginning of the war and of the German occupation of France and Belgium there had been repeated demands in the Junker press of Germany that the captive populations should be put to work, forcibly if necessary, by the German authorities, in order to replace some of the labour which Germany had lost as a consequence of the calling of

so many of her men to the army. During the first year and a half of the war nothing was actually done by the German authorities in France or in Belgium to force the population to work for the Germans, although every effort was made to induce the people, by offers of high wages and other advantages, to work for the Germans. In the spring of 1916 there began to appear in the German press a series of articles demanding that the people in France and in Belgium should be compelled to work for the Germans. As usual this was the prelude to action on the part of the general staff. It was finally decided that the labour necessary for the gathering of the harvest in the agricultural regions of France and for maintaining the German saw-mills, roadways and other trench industries should be provided by securing a large number of working people from the densely-populated industrial cities of the north. The Germans justified this intention by stating that the people in the crowded cities had much difficulty in securing the necessary food; that life was easier and more pleasant in the country districts; that it would be healthful to the individuals sent to the country and helpful to their compatriots staying behind, as the labour taken would be employed in gathering the new harvest, a considerable portion of which would be turned over to the district relief committees for distribution.

**The Beginning of the Deportations.**—On April 25, 1916, the German officer in charge of the relief operations in Northern France notified Mr. W. B. Poland, director of the Commission at Brussels, that it was the intention of the general staff to evacuate 50,000 people from Lille, Roubaix and Tourcoing to the agricultural districts of Vervins and Charleville. He added that so far as possible volunteers would be asked for; that whole families would be transported together wherever possible; and that in general only labourers would be selected for the work. As soon as the reports of the actual proceedings in Lille and other places reached Brussels, however, an entirely different light was shed on the whole proceedings. It appeared that the commandant of Lille announced that all people must remain in their houses from 6 o'clock in the evening until 8 o'clock the next morning with candles or other lights in the halls and with their luggage ready for transport. German troops would go through the house and select the people to be sent off.

The deportation was carried out in the most brutal manner. Despite the protest of the people, families were broken up; wives were taken from their homes and families; many young girls and young women from 18 to 25 years old were included among the deportees. Young girls from the most respectable families were placed together with the most unsavoury characters of the city and sent off without any supervision and protection, often without any luggage whatsoever and always without any idea of their destination. The distress of the population at these deportations was naturally intense.

**The Delegates summoned to Charleville.**—Hardly had these reports come to Brussels, when a telephone message came from Charleville that the American Ambassador was there, engaged in conferences with the Emperor over the 'Sussex' controversy, and desired to meet the delegates for Northern France. The delegates and most of their *Verpflegungsoffiziers* were then in Brussels, but they were hastily gathered together in response to the laconic telephonic summons. Some of the officers were stopped as they were about to board trains for Germany and informed of the summons. All the delegates, the director and three of the German officers were thus collected and the whole party proceeded to Charleville on a special train, provided at the request of the great headquarters, wondering what impending calamity was responsible for this sudden and unusual summons to the headquarters. When they arrived they learned that they were desired only as

ornaments to a tea the general quartermaster's chief of staff had decided to give to Ambassador Gerard. It had occurred to him it would be a polite thing to gather these young countrymen of Mr. Gerard's to exhibit in connection with the demonstration the Germans were giving to the Ambassador of how *they* cared for the people. The result, however, turned out to be altogether different from what the Germans had confidently believed.

**Mr. Poland explodes a Bombshell at the Tea Party.**—The tea party referred to was attended by the general and his staff, by Ambassador Gerard and the Chancellor of his Embassy, Mr. Grew, by the American delegates in Northern France and their attached officers, and by Mr. Poland, director of the Commission at Brussels. Mr. Poland had just received the distressing news of the deportations from Lille, Tourcoing and Roubaix, and his sympathetic nature revolting at the tale impelled him to do something to stop the tragic happenings which had been reported. On the way down to Charleville therefore, when he learned the party was to meet Ambassador Gerard, it occurred to him that this was a most admirable opportunity for taking up at once and directly with Mr. Gerard and with the general staff the question of the deportations from Lille. While on the way to Charleville, therefore, he approached several of the German *Verpflegungsoffiziers* and they had promised him that they would support his representations. They agreed with him, they said, that the deportations were brutal and unnecessary and should be stopped.

When the proper opportunity occurred at the tea therefore, Mr. Poland raised the issue. A bombshell bursting in the room would have hardly produced more astonishment than the raising of this question in the midst of what was ostensibly a quiet social tea. Mr. Poland described to the Ambassador and to General Zoellner the distressing conditions which had arisen in Lille as a result of the evacuation and proceeded to protest most energetically against the whole proceedings. He said that so far as lack of food in the congested districts of the north was concerned, this condition would immediately disappear if the Commission increased its flour ration and if the Germans distributed the 200 grammes of potatoes per day *per capita*. Mr. Poland said, secondly, that if the evacuation was intended as a punishment for slight disturbances, it would have anything but a salutary effect and would produce much worse conditions from a military point of view than had before existed. Thirdly, if the deportation was due to the German desire to have workmen in the agricultural districts, only workmen should have been deported and the deportees should not have been selected indiscriminately from the whole population and especially from among the women and girls of the better classes. The American delegates present vouched for the accuracy of the statements in regard to the actual conditions under which the evacuation was carried out.

**The Test of the German Officers.**—When Poland turned to the officers for further corroboration, however, some of them remarked that the deportation was being carried out in a very proper and satisfactory manner and that the French people were very happy to be taken from Lille to the quiet, peaceful, rural districts of the departements of the Aisne, Marne and the Ardennes. Of all the German officers who had promised to support Mr. Poland's representations, not one dared open his mouth in the presence of his superior officers. One of the officers from Northern France who had not been present on the train proved himself, however, to be a man in the best sense of the word. He confirmed everything Mr. Poland had said and agreed with Mr. Poland that it had been a very great mistake on the part of the German army to carry out the new deportation. This officer was Ober-

Leutenant, later Rittmeister, Paul Neuerbourg, the *Verpflegungsoffizier* for the district of Valenciennes, who more than once proved his probity and sincere devotion to the task to which he had been assigned, i.e. of seeing that the French population received the food necessary to keep them in life and health.

**Results of Poland's intervention.**—Both General Zoellner and Ambassador Gerard expressed their great surprise at the statements. General Zoellner promised that an immediate investigation would be made and the troubles remedied. He said the general commanding the Lille district would be summoned immediately to Charleville to give an explanation of the conditions under which the deportations were carried out. As a matter of fact, as a result of the representations made by Mr. Poland, the deportations were stopped immediately. Some 22,000 of the people had already been removed from Lille, Tourcoing and Roubaix to the southern district, 10,000 to the district of Vervins, and 12,000 to the district of Charleville, but the original intention to deport 50,000 was never carried out.

This episode is interesting because it shows the influence which the Relief Commission exercised in France and the power that it had of occasionally intervening between the German authorities and the population to soften the effect of some of the more extreme German measures of oppression. For his straightforward courage in making these representations to the German Government, Mr. Poland was later awarded the much coveted ribbon of Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur. The American delegates for the districts of Lille and Valenciennes, Mr. L. C. Wellington and Gardner Richardson, who had provided Mr. Poland with the information of the conditions under which the evacuation had been carried out, stood out no less manfully for the rights of the population of the districts which they represented, although they knew that in doing so they would be gaining the hatred of the more violent of the German officers with whom they associated. Mr. Richardson had just gone to Charleville from Valenciennes as the Commission's delegate there, the week that the conference was held with the Ambassador. He was never forgiven by the officers at Charleville for the determined way in which he had stood to his guns in giving evidence of the conditions of the deportees who had arrived at Charleville.

**The 'Deportees' and 'Conscripts' of Northern France.**—The question of these deportations continued for several months to be a source of constant friction between the German authorities in France and the Commission. This friction was caused, partly by the attitude of the Commission that these people should not have been deported and that the whole affair was a miserable and tragic blunder, and also by the problem of the feeding of the twenty-odd thousand who had been actually sent to the districts of Charleville and Vervins. Closely associated with the problem of the deportees was that of the so-called civil prisoners in France. Even in the previous year the Germans had begun the policy of removing all the men of mobilisable age, 'conscripts' as they called them, from their homes to internment camps through the invaded part of Northern France. Some of these 'conscripts' were housed by the Germans in tents or temporary shelters in the open fields, others in caserns or large public buildings, and still others in groups of cottages in the villages. There was very little difference between the attitude taken by the Germans toward these unhappy men and boys, whom they had practically made prisoners of war, and their treatment of the deportees. In both cases the question of who was to supply the people the food and of how it was to be distributed caused much difficulty. The Germans, though they had taken the so-called 'conscripts' as prisoners of war and treated them practically as if they were prisoners of war, yet refused to take the



responsibility of caring for them in the manner required by international conventions in the case of prisoners of war.

**The German Treatment of the Deportees and Conscripts.**—The deportees and the conscripts were often kept in the same camps and were put to doing almost exactly the same sort of work. Perhaps 40 per cent. of the total number were actually engaged in work on the land, viz., tilling the soil, caring for the growing crops and doing the work of harvesting. The others were employed in work which more or less directly served the military interests of the German army. The men were often set to cutting down the French forests and the long rows of noble and stately trees that lined the French highways. Hundreds of saw-mills were opened up by the Germans to cut up the timber thus provided, for use in the trenches. Practically all the work, both of cutting the timber and of sawing it into lumber was done by the French civil prisoners and deportees. The Germans from the first had provided them with a very insufficient food-ration; a few slices of bread a day, with a muddy substitute for coffee in the morning and at noon a soup containing infinitesimal bits of meat and vegetables of various kinds. The men were paid in the beginning only 40 pfennigs a day for this work. In some cases they were graciously allowed by the Germans to expend these 40 pfennigs either by purchasing native food-supplies, such as milk, potatoes and vegetables, or at the German canteens where a small extra ration of bread could be obtained and where soda-water and cigarettes were furnished at exorbitant prices. Many of these people, conscripts and deportees alike, had been taken from their homes without having had any opportunity to take their clothing, bed-covers and eating utensils with them. In the heavy work at which they were employed they soon wore out the clothing they had and were reduced to a most pitiful state.

**The Commission intervenes in Relief of the Conscripts and Deportees.**—The conditions of these people soon became so deplorable that the French committees in the districts and communes insisted that something should be done to relieve them. The question of whether or not the Germans were responsible for their feeding seemed of little consequence when they saw before their eyes their compatriots forced to do heavy labour with insufficient clothing and nourishment. The delegates of the Commission likewise realised that the question was not one of political import alone, but that it was a matter of pure humanity to see that these people, dragged from their homes by the Germans, did not perish from cold and hunger. Consequently, as soon as the deportations began, instructions were sent out to all the French committees in the districts of Charleville and Vervins that they should supply the deportees with the same ration received by the local population, with a supplement of 25 per cent. to replace supplies of native food which were available to the local population but which the deportees at first had no hope nor opportunity of obtaining. It was made a condition by the Commission in supplying the camps of these deportees with food that its delegates should be entitled to visit the camps and to make sure that the food actually reached the French people for whom it was intended.

**Inspection of the Camps by American Delegates.**—The American delegates, accordingly, were permitted by the German officers to go with them on their tours of inspection of these camps. The things which came within notice of the delegates on these occasions were probably more heartrending than any experience the representatives of the Commission ever had in Belgium or Northern France until the similar deportations a few months later in Belgium. The people who had been deported from the Lille district were of all classes and ages. There were boys of 15 and men of 60, there were mothers

of families who had been torn away from their husbands, and children and young girls of gentle birth who had never worked in their lives before and who had been carefully protected from association with the rougher and more brutal aspects of life. In many cases chronic invalids had been taken along with the healthy. The delegate in the district of Charleville, Mr. T. B. Kittredge, found several cases of people in the last stages of tuberculosis, whose lives were hastened to an untimely end through the privation, the coarse and insufficient food, and the exposure to which they were subjected. As a rule, the men and women were kept in separate camps, although this was not always the case. Very few families were at first allowed to be together, but after a month or two the Germans, as a result of a strenuous protest and representations of the Commission, began to attempt in a half-hearted way to collect the families which had been separated in the deportations and to permit them to live together in some deserted cottage which would be assigned to them. The Germans after a short while also began to overhaul the lists of those who had been deported and to return to their families those in ill-health or those of gentle birth. It must be said that a very large proportion of the local commandants in the districts to which these deportees were sent deeply and sincerely regretted the action taken by the general staff and the incompetent and brutal way in which the orders of the general staff had been carried out by the officers commanding in the northern districts. Many of these local commandants did everything within their power and even exceeded their authority in attempting to alleviate the conditions of these deportees. The medical officers were especially commendable in this respect. They gave medical care and attention to those who were ill and used their influence to have many people returned to Lille and the other cities in the north. Their sympathy was openly with the deportees and, in many camps which the Americans visited, the people had nothing but praise for the medical officers.

**Results of the Deportations.**—There was another aspect to these deportations, probably not contemplated by the general staff, which had even more disastrous results. The young girls and women were kept together in camps which in many cases were located within the district of actual operations. These districts were necessarily overflowing with the passing thousands of German soldiers on their way to and from service in the trenches. Girls of the best families and character were herded with women with no character at all. The moral consequence of such contact, under the conditions that prevailed, can easily be imagined. By showing complacency to the lusts of soldiery these women could gain for themselves protectors in the army of their enemies; they could be exempted from labour, could receive better food and better treatment. The inevitable result was the moral degradation of a considerable proportion of these girls in camps near the front. When finally they were returned to their homes, before the coming winter, nearly 30 per cent. were pregnant and were thus marked with the eternal shame of having been a mother to a German child. This aspect of the deportation was, of course, the most horrible of all and something which shocked to the innermost core the heart of civilisation.

**The attitude of the German Officers and the trials of the Delegates.**—The representatives of the Commission, wandering from camp to camp, were forced to witness these conditions and to realise their own helplessness to do anything for these people except to secure increases in the supplies of food and clothing. When they would protest to their officers they would often meet with a cynical and brutal response. On one occasion the delegate in the district of Charleville with his officer, a scientist of great reputation in Germany, visited one of these camps of women. Some 40 women were herded together

in two adjoining cottages of about 10 rooms in all. The women had very little bed-clothing and no clothes at all save those they had on their backs, which were rapidly falling into rags and tatters. Some of the women had obviously led immoral lives previously, but others, no less obviously, were acquiring for the first time the bitter knowledge of the world's heartlessness and brutality. The delegate protested to his officer about the conditions under which these women were kept and especially against the liberties which the German soldiers loitering about were permitted to take with them. The officer shrugged his shoulders and sneered: 'These are the prostitutes of Lille; what does it matter if they practice their profession here or there?' The delegate, boiling with helpless rage, could say no more. This was but an illustration of the unpleasant and trying character of the functions of the Commission's representatives in Northern France. They were there on a definite mission. They had no authority; they had only responsibility. Their only resource in the case of abuses was a threat to cut off the food-supply to the population, and this was a threat which would have injured the population far more than it did the Germans, even though the Germans might have been compelled to feed the people themselves. The delegates therefore had to see and hear much that bore heavily on their minds and hearts, and had to keep grimly silent when all their native instincts rebelled against the inhumanity which they witnessed in the conduct of the martinet of the German army toward the unfortunate and helpless civil population.

**The Commission's reasons for feeding the Deportees and Conscripts.**—The Commission on mere grounds of humanity agreed to feed, not only the deportees, but also the so-called 'conscripts' or civil prisoners, even though this was contrary to the principles on which the Commission had begun its work. The Commission and its representatives, realising their helplessness to control the German army, could not forget their mission was one of humanity and their chief aim was to see that the civil population was kept alive and in health. Beside this aim nothing else mattered very much. The Commission, of course, used its influence to the greatest possible extent to secure modification of the harshness of the German rule toward the population, but with varying success.

After the harvests were over most of the deportees were allowed to return to their homes in the north. A few who had been of the mobilisable age were kept back by the Germans and put into the internment camps with the other conscripts. A few of the women also remained behind, according to the Germans at their own request, but what motives lay behind the request it was impossible to discover.

These deportations in Northern France and the internment of practically the whole male population of military age was but a prelude to the even more tragic events which were soon to take place in the territory of the General Government in Belgium. The Germans in Belgium and France were to ruthlessly carry out the edict of the general staff that the civil populations of the occupied territories were to be cajoled or forced into working for the Germans.

#### RELATIONS BETWEEN THE GERMANS AND AMERICANS IN NORTHERN FRANCE DURING 1916

**Changes of Personnel in Northern France.**—The personnel of the Commission had always changed somewhat more frequently in France than in Belgium. There were but few of the delegates who could remain more than six months at a post in Northern France.

The nervous strain of the work there was very great and, although the directors at Brussels followed the policy of sending their best and steadiest men to the posts in France, the delegates, with a few notable exceptions, found conditions too strenuous in France for a long stay.

Caspar Whitney left as chief representative in March 1916, being succeeded by Mr. E. C. Thurston. The latter found it impossible, however, to endure the nervous tension occasioned by the situation at Charleville. He therefore returned to a post in Belgium in April and was succeeded by Mr. Gardner Richardson, who remained until July and was then in turn succeeded by Mr. T. B. Kittredge, who remained at Charleville till the end of the work of the Americans in the occupied territories. The position of chief representative really no longer existed after Mr. Whitney left. The work had become so well organised that it was felt better to leave the decision of all the executive matters to the directors in Brussels. The practice of having a local delegate at Charleville as well as a chief representative was discontinued and the general representative therefore became practically only the delegate for the district of Charleville. He continued to be a go-between between the general staff and the Brussels office, but all important matters were acted upon by the director in Brussels.

**The causes of friction between the Germans and Americans in France.**—In view of the action of the German authorities in such matters as the deportations from Lille, it was only natural that the relations between the German officers and the American delegates and between the general staff and the Commission should become somewhat strained in 1916. There were also other reasons for the appearance of friction between the Germans and the Americans in Northern France. The reasons for these go back to one of the essential conditions of the work in France.

The German officers who were assigned to each district remained permanently at their posts. At first they bore the title 'Begleitsoffiziers,' i.e. accompanying officers, and their functions corresponded to the title. They were to accompany the delegates about their districts in France, to keep them out of mischief and out of difficulties, to intervene for them with the military authorities, to read their correspondence, send their telephone and telegraphic messages, and to generally keep watch over them. The delegates used to apply the term 'wet nurse' to their German officers to indicate jokingly the relations that existed between them. But, as time passed, the German officers came to have more and more influence and authority, the American delegates less. The officer came to know all the French committees and to be intimately aware of the conditions existing in all parts of the districts. He was kept constantly informed by the military authorities of the whole course of affairs in so far as the civil population was concerned.

**The German Officers assume greater Authority.**—The German officers were also, as a rule, efficient and mature men, and gradually they began on their own initiative or on the inspiration of headquarters to assume a more direct control of the relief operations. The result of the constant changes in the personnel of the Commission's delegates was that periodically a new delegate would come into each district, knowing nothing about it, acquainted with none of its conditions. He would naturally be unable to have the same grasp of the situation as the man who had always been on the spot. So inch by inch and month by month the functions of the German officers came to overshadow those of the delegates. The German officers were finally given the title 'Verplegungsoffizier,' i.e. 'officier de ravitaillement,' a term difficult to translate into English, but which signified that

the officer had charge of all operations having to do with the relief and provisioning of the population. In addition to the supervision of the distribution of imported food, the German officers had under their immediate and direct control the whole of the distributions of the food provided by the Germans from native sources and this naturally gave them a greater control and authority than they had had in the beginning.

It is not to be assumed that this process went on without the Commission's knowledge or without any efforts on its part to check the gradual encroachment of the German officers. Because of the nature of the situation, however, the Commission was fighting a losing fight. The fact that it fought at all contributed to increase the friction between the American delegates and the officers in their districts. The increased diplomatic tension in the spring of 1916, and the attitude then taken by many of the officers, also helped to make life in France very different and far less pleasant than it had been the previous year.

**The attitude of the Chief Representative September 1915-March 1916.**—Another factor that helped the German officers somewhat in their campaign to restrict the delegates' functions was the attitude of the chief representative, who, though personally an able man, lacked the equipment necessary for the successful representation of the Commission at the great headquarters. He knew neither French nor German and was consequently completely dependent on the officers with whom he worked for information on what was going on about him. Gifted with a charming personality, he possessed one of the fatal defects of such characters, an unwillingness to stand out against those about him if this involved disturbing the pleasantness of the atmosphere in which he lived. He was therefore content with knowing that all was going well and that the guarantees were being observed, even though he knew that at the same time the Germans were gradually assuming a greater and more direct control over the distribution even of imported foods. He was absent for two months on a visit to Poland as a guest of the Germans, on an investigation of the possibilities of relief work there. During his absence the grip of the German officers on the situation was considerably tightened. Many of the delegates, realising the process that was going on, fought against the encroachments of the officers, but found scant support from the chief representative. Such resistance caused friction and trouble and, realising the Commission's lack of any real authority, the chief representative thought it advisable to avoid conflict, even if such avoidance involved the surrender of a considerable part of the authority originally exercised by the delegates. He wanted the delegates to play their part as gracefully as possible, but thought it more important to maintain tranquillity than to insist upon the Commission's power of control. Consequently the delegates sometimes found their chief representative siding with the German officers against themselves on protests which they had made to the Brussels office about the way things were developing in France.

**The situation in the Spring of 1916.**—Some of the German officers, in fact most of them, were men inclined, if they could, to assume the usual domineering attitude which the world has come to know as typically Prussian. These officers, with a high conception of their duties to the German army and of their responsibility to their country, considered it part of their work to sidetrack the American delegates. By the spring of 1916 they had nearly accomplished this end.

The American delegates were for the most part capable and energetic young men. They had no fear and no respect for the German military system. The only considerations which moved them were their obligations to the population which they were serving and their loyalty to the Commission and its purpose. Consequently they fought as valiantly

as they could to maintain their own position, because they realised that the whole existence and continuance of the Commission's work depended on their maintenance of a proper control of food distribution within their respective districts. Their attitude and their belief that they should keep control of the situation was naturally in violent conflict with the attitude of the German officers that all matters should be left to the officer alone for settlement.

**The increased tension due to the International Situation.**—The submarine campaign of 1916, and the American attitude toward this method of warfare, naturally did not make the relations between the officers and delegates any more pleasant. The Germans realised that American public opinion had condemned them and they were bitter with rage. They thought to turn the tables by making the most violent and blustering protests against the supplies of munition and foodstuffs which the United States permitted its citizens to send to the allied countries. At the time of the 'Sussex' affair the crisis naturally came to its height and for a time several of the American delegates were practically treated as prisoners. They were not allowed to leave the houses in which they lived unaccompanied, because, as the Germans said, 'in a few weeks we may be enemies.'

At Charleville the situation was perhaps more difficult and unpleasant than at any post in France. Charleville was the great headquarters and was therefore the centre of German activities. The first officer for the district of Charleville, who had been a capable, pleasant and agreeable man, was succeeded by a man of very different character, a man who in a way represented the highest product in German culture, who was a Professor of Science at a big German University, and a man of world-wide reputation in his own field. He had himself fought in the war, and had been severely wounded, though over the age of military service, and this wound had made him more or less neurasthenic. He was convinced, on theoretical grounds, that the welfare of humanity depended on the domination of the world by Germany, by German ideas and German methods. Consequently he excused every action taken up by Germany in the war on the grounds that it was a necessary means to a desirable end. He was a man of academic mind and of a cold and austere personality, and he consequently proved to be a most disagreeable associate to the delegates with whom he worked.

In a memorandum of May 1916, Mr. Poland, the director of the Commission at Brussels, reported on the conditions in Northern France. He said: 'For a number of reasons, such as the failure to have maintained the American representatives continually at Charleville and especially because of the personal characteristics of Captain — at Charleville, of the equally peculiar personal characteristics of Captain — at Vervins, and the unfortunate state of health of Captain — at Lille, the relationship of the American representatives and the German officers for the north of France has of late become exceedingly unsatisfactory. The strained feeling existing between Germany and the United States is felt most strongly by the military, particularly in the district of Charleville. The result is that the American representative is allowed no personal initiative and is treated with suspicion and extreme lack of consideration to such an extent that Mr. Thurston was not able to stand the conditions and was forced to beg to be relieved. Mr. Richardson as the most available man was put in his place, but, although he has conducted himself with the greatest discretion and forbearance, he also finds the situation almost insupportable. Count W. and Captain Z. at Charleville have indulged in violent criticisms of Americans, and Captain Z. has definitely stated that he considered it necessary that the

German authorities should regard all American representatives as possible spies and that they should be treated accordingly. It seems necessary, therefore, as the situation is becoming almost impossible, that Mr. Hoover on his next visit to Brussels should arrange an interview with Major von Kessler, for the purpose of readjusting the Commission for Relief in Belgium's position in Northern France.'

**The question of the Inspection of new Communes.**—The conflict of authority between the German officers and the American delegates came into evidence especially on such disputed questions as that of the right of the American delegate to visit all regions not yet included in the ravitaillement before these should be added to the districts provisioned by the Commission. Most of these districts outside of the territory originally included in the program of relief work were close to the front and were in the zone of operations. At the beginning of the relief work in April 1915 it had been verbally understood that before any new district should be added the delegates of the Commission should visit the districts in question, make an investigation of the situation, instruct the local French authorities as to the duties that would devolve upon them in connection with the relief work, and report to Brussels on the advisability of extending the relief work to the districts in question. Later on, when the question arose of actually extending the work (usually at the request of the Germans themselves), it was found that the military authorities were reluctant to permit the American delegates to go to these districts, because they often lay close to crucial points of the German lines. There was more or less discussion and friction between the Commission and the Germans every time the question of feeding new territory arose.

**The case of St. Mihiel.** The question first came to a definite issue in the spring of 1916, when Mr. C. G. Bowden, then delegate for the district of Longwy, insisted that he be allowed to go to St. Mihiel before any food was shipped to that place. The Germans, however, absolutely refused to permit Bowden to visit St. Mihiel. Bowden took up the matter with Mr. Caspar Whitney, the general representative for Northern France, and with the Brussels office. The Brussels office endorsed emphatically Mr. Bowden's stand in the matter, and at the end of February Caspar Whitney wrote to the Brussels office that the German authorities had conceded the point and would permit the American delegate to visit any new districts before the work should be extended to them.

**An unsettled Controversy.**—Mr. Whitney, however, seems to have taken a too optimistic view of the assurance which the Germans gave him in the matter, for when Mr. Thurston came to Charleville in March 1916 he was brusquely told that the American delegates had no right to visit a new territory before it was included within the area provisioned. For that matter, he was told, the American delegates had no rights at all and were merely living on sufferance in France. Mr. Thurston took up the matter again with Brussels. The Brussels office supported him and insisted on the position laid down in Mr. Whitney's letter to which the Germans were said to have agreed. The officer at headquarters refused, however, to admit that he had ever given any such assurance. He said that wherever possible the American delegates would be taken, if convenient, to the regions in question before the food shipments actually began, but that this was not to be considered a regular arrangement as military considerations might frequently make it impossible for the headquarters of the various armies to permit the Americans to go at any given time into the zone of operations.

There the matter rested. The Germans refused to make any further concessions.

The Commission, likewise, continued to insist that the American delegates should visit every region before food was sent in. No agreement was ever reached on the question. As a matter of practical necessity, however, each application for admission to the area fed was considered separately and was usually approved by the Commission even though the delegate had not previously visited it.

**The appointment and removal of French Committees.**—Another of the disputed questions between the German officers and the American delegates was the question of the appointment and removal of the French trustees and committees encharged with the actual working of distributing food. It frequently happened that in parts of the districts local committees or warehouse managers failed to carry out the instructions given them by the Commission and the French district committee. This was sometimes due to ignorance, sometimes to deliberate and intentional disregard of instructions. In the latter case there arose the question of what means could be taken to force the disobedient committees or warehouse managers into compliance with instructions. The German officers, as a matter of principle, took the position that they alone had the right to make any changes in the personnel of the committees. They denied that the Commission had any right whatsoever to make or to insist upon any change. They admitted this right only grudgingly even to the French regional and district committees. In many cases obstinate mayors and local committees were upheld by the officers in the violation of instructions. The question therefore came to be quite serious.

The convention of April 1915 had provided that the French regional and district committees and the French trustees or warehouse managers should be appointed by the French themselves with the approval of the Commission for Relief in Belgium and of the German army command ; but, as in the case of many other provisions in the convention, the Germans conveniently disregarded this and insisted that the approval of the Commission for Relief in Belgium was a mere formality which could be taken for granted ; that it rested with the German authorities alone to nominate and remove French committee men and warehouse managers. The dispute on this point, also, was never settled by a definite agreement, although the German officers succeeded in effectively preventing the American representatives from actually having any part in the appointment or removal of the agents of the French committees.

**The indirect influence of the American Delegates.**—The American representatives often found that while the German officers refused absolutely to permit the Americans to take any definite action on their own initiative, these officers would usually subsequently carry into effect themselves the changes or measures demanded by the delegate. Thus, on one occasion, in the district of Vervins, the American delegate, while making an inspection in a village, found that German soldiers were sleeping in the same building in which the flour for the people was kept and that there was no partition between the place where the flour was kept and the sleeping quarters of the soldiers. The American delegate pointed out that this might easily lead to abuse and that the soldiers should either be required to sleep somewhere else or a suitable partition should be erected, so that the flour could be locked up. The German officer grew quite indignant that the American should even have ventured to make the suggestion and said it was none of his business ; that the soldiers knew their orders forbade them to take any of the flour ; and that the American should be content with knowing that all German military orders were obeyed without question by the soldiers. This did not, however, satisfy Mr. Simpson, the Commission's delegate, and he continued



to insist that some change should be made, but succeeded only in making his officer furious. The next time that Mr. Simpson visited the village in question, however, he found that the change that he had insisted upon had been made at the request of his officer.

**The Delegates' Control in Northern France.**—Many similar matters arranged themselves in somewhat the same way. The German officers did not like to have the American delegates complaining to Brussels that things were not going well in their districts. It was part of the business of these officers to see that the German guarantees were observed. Wherever possible, therefore, the German officer would himself remedy any abuses which the American detected, or would cause them to be remedied, although he would persistently refuse to admit that there was any reason or justice in the criticisms of the delegates. The American delegates also found that very often when definite instructions on difficult points came from the Brussels office the German officers would usually carry these instructions into effect themselves, even though they would have indignantly refused to take any action had the delegate made any such request.

Many of the representatives, therefore, gave up the useless procedure of arguing with their officer and accomplished what they wanted by the simple expedient of dictating letters to themselves while at Brussels over the week-end, giving themselves definite instructions that such and such classes of people should or should not be fed, that the reports should be handled in this or that manner, etc. They would then have these letters signed by the director of the Commission at Brussels. The following week the letter would be despatched to them through the German officers, as was the case with all mail. The German officer would receive the letter of instructions and, without saying anything to the delegate and often without handing him the letter, would proceed to carry the instructions into effect on his own initiative.

In spite of all the restrictions under which the delegates worked, they did find means of knowing very accurately what was going on in their districts from week to week and month to month. In spite of all the German attempts to restrict their information, news of what was happening reached them through many channels and, though they had but little real executive power themselves in matters which concerned the food distribution, they were yet able in most cases to carry their point in every really important matter.

**The question of Feeding Belgians in Northern France.**—This is illustrated by an incident that occurred in the summer of 1916, after the deportation of Belgian workmen had begun. Until June 1916 the Commission had issued orders to the French district committees to give food-rations to all Belgians who happened to be in Northern France. The matter had come up chiefly in the districts of Lille, Valenciennes and Longwy. In these districts many Belgian workmen had gone across the frontier to work in the mines, on the canals or on the railroads. As the number was comparatively small, only a few thousand in all, the Commission had made no objection to feeding these workmen. In June 1916, however, the officer in the district of Charleville announced that the railroad direction was about to bring in 2,000 to 3,000 Belgian workmen for repair work on the railroads in that area. As a matter of form, he announced to the American representatives that these workmen would, of course, be fed by the Relief Commission. But the representatives thought otherwise. There were already rumours in the air of wholesale deportations from Belgium and it was announced that many thousands of these deportees would probably be sent into Northern France. The Commission had definitely taken the position

that if the Germans forced the population to work for them the Commission would no longer feed those who were thus deported and compelled to labour. The American representative knew of this attitude of the Commission, and on reporting the matter to Brussels found that the Brussels office was in entire agreement with his position that the Commission could not feed any unlimited number of Belgians. After some little discussion in Brussels, therefore, at the meetings of the delegates it was finally decided that the Commission could only feed those Belgians who had been in Northern France before July 15, 1916. All Belgians coming after that date would have to find their food elsewhere than at the storehouses of the Commission. The Germans, naturally, were displeased at the measure, but after considerable grumbling assented to it. The railroad workmen brought to the district of Charleville were therefore fed by the Germans themselves and received no rations from the Commission.

**The question of Feeding 'Free' Workmen.**—Some months later, however, the question came up again in a new and subtle form. This was after the deportation of Belgians had been in progress for some time. In October the Germans decided that they would put the Belgian deportees and the French 'conscripts' or civil prisoners to work at the same tasks and would treat them in the same manner. They said also that they would make the distinction between workmen who were 'caserné' and those who were free. In the case of those who were housed in barracks under guard (casernés) the Germans would themselves provide the food, no matter whether the workmen in question were Belgian or French. For those who were free, however, i.e. for those who were allowed to live scattered about in places of their own choice and who to escape compulsion had agreed to work voluntarily, the food should be provided through the local warehouses of the Commission, no matter whether the workmen were Belgian or French. In addition the Germans would permit these free workmen to buy certain quantities of meat and bread from the German military depôts.

This proposition looked innocent enough on the surface and was actually embodied in army orders and put into force by the Germans before the American delegate in the district of Charleville discovered the joker in the proposition. The German officers had been very careful to see that the American representative learned nothing of the working of the scheme until it was actually in effect. They had spoken of their intention of making a distinction between the workmen kept in barracks and those who were to be treated as free workmen. The American delegate, not understanding the implication and believing they were referring only to the French conscripts, all of whom were already given rations by the Commission, agreed that that would be rather a good thing. The German officer therefore considered that he had gained the assent of the Commission to the plan which he proceeded to carry into effect.

**The German Plan to use the Commission.**—The plan, roughly, was as follows: Thousands of Belgian workmen who had been deported to labour behind the trenches in Northern France were poorly fed and miserably treated by the Germans, unless they would consent to work voluntarily. Under the scheme which the Germans had worked out they were able to offer as an additional temptation to the Belgian to induce him to forget his patriotic scruples and to agree to work willingly for the Germans a food-ration, to be supplied by the Commission and supplemented by the Germans, which was more ample than that which he was forced to be content with so long as he refused to work willingly. The Germans obviously had the idea that gradually the Belgians would give up their

resistance and agree to work willingly and that thus most of the burden of feeding them would be automatically transferred to the Commission.

**The American Delegate intervenes.**—But one day at a district committee meeting the American delegate suddenly learned from the discussions of the French committee what had been going on. One of the French committee men asked if the Belgians who were called by the Germans 'free' workmen should in reality be fed from the stores of the Commission. The German officer immediately said 'Yes' and tried to avoid discussing the point, since he was aware of the objections which the American representative would raise. But several other members of the committee asked questions about the same matter and the German officer finally found himself compelled to make quite a lengthy explanation of the treatment to be accorded to the various classes of workmen. In talking of the workmen he said that the Germans had decided to provide the food themselves for all workmen kept in barracks under guard, while all the free workmen would be fed by the Commission. The American representative long since had caught the point and urging a favourable moment interrupted the German officer by saying to him in a low tone in English: 'Of course you understand, captain, that no Belgians, whether free or casernés, can be fed by the Commission in Northern France except those who were in France before July 15.' The officer, confused and irritated, said he understood nothing of the sort, but the American delegate, as concisely and as elegantly as he knew how, laid down the law of the Commission on this point. which, he said, was as immutable as an ancient edict of the Medes and Persians. The German officer then announced to the committee that there had apparently been a misunderstanding and that further instructions would be sent out later when the matter was settled. There were enough of the members of the committee who understood English to appreciate the meaning of this incident, and they appeared immensely satisfied and pleased at the way in which the German army as personified in the person of Captain — had been halted in mid-course by the objection of an American delegate.

**The Germans recognise defeat and yield.**—The question of whether these Belgian 'free' workmen should be fed was discussed further and at length by the delegate and his officer over the luncheon table. The officer insisted that the delegate had given his consent to the plan proposed of having all free workmen fed by the Commission, but the delegate equally firmly said that when he had given that permission he had been thinking and had referred only to the French workmen, as the Commission's stand was immovable in the refusal to feed the deported Belgian workmen. The matter was referred to the headquarters of the Commission at Brussels, and it most emphatically backed up the position taken by the local delegate. The German officer realised that he was beaten and had to scurry about among the dignitaries of the local German army to get the orders changed and to provide for the feeding of the deported Belgians from other than the Commission food. The officer had, of course, realised all the time that the Commission would object to the feeding of these Belgians, but had perhaps believed that he could in a clandestine way put 2,000 or 3,000 of them on the Commission's rationed list and thus do a patriotic duty to his country by saving them just so much food. This knowledge, and his consciousness of his own insincerity, probably accounted for the readiness with which the German officer yielded when the point was actually brought to decision.

**The Conditions in France improve in the Summer of 1916.**—Many other similar cases might be related, but these suffice to give an idea of the relations which existed in 1916 between the delegates in Northern France and their officers. In general it can be

said that the relations became somewhat bettered when the 'Sussex' crisis and the diplomatic tension that had accompanied it passed over. After a month or two the unfortunate friction in several of the districts apparently disappeared and the relations became again fairly harmonious. As a result of the definite stand taken by the Commission the Germans were forced to give way on certain points. The personal intervention of Mr. Hoover and the energetic and tactful work of Dr. Kellogg smoothed away many of the difficulties, and the position of the delegates in Northern France became somewhat more tolerable after the international crisis of May was over. The delegates succeeded in holding a sufficient supervision of the work of the French committees to ensure the observance of the guarantees. The effective support given them by the Brussels office, under the direction successively of Mr. Poland, Dr. Kellogg and Mr. Gregory, enabled them to regain the authority indispensable to their work. They did not, of course, get back the privileges the first delegates had enjoyed in 1915, but were forced to content themselves with the general supervision and inspection of the work. Their influence was, however, sufficient to ensure the difficult discharge of the Commission's responsibilities in Northern France. The situation continued *in statu quo* until February 1917, when the breach of diplomatic relations brought an immediate end to the activities of Americans in Northern France.

#### NEGOTIATIONS CONCERNING THE 1916 HARVEST IN NORTHERN FRANCE AND THE BELGIAN ETAPES

**The Allied attitude toward the Harvest of the Occupied Areas.**—In December 1915 the British Foreign Office had determined to make greater efforts to check the appropriation by the Germans of the indigenous products of the occupied territories. They had made a thorough investigation into the situation in Belgium and into the working of the Commission. In the letter of December 31, 1915, they had presented demands for new and extensive guarantees protecting the produce of Belgium. The imports of the Commission were definitely limited by the program of February 23. The Commission had been spurred into erecting a department of inspection and control to more adequately supervise the relief operations in the territory of the General Government. The Germans, recognising the determination of the Allies, had finally conceded the principal demands. The April guarantees given by von Bissing prohibited the export of food from the General Government and limited its use to the civil population.

**The situation in Northern France and the Belgian Etapes.**—At the same time the British and French Governments had made clear their intention to compel the Germans to make similar concessions in regard to the harvests of those wide areas in Northern France and Belgium that lay outside the jurisdiction of the General Government in Belgium. In March officials of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs had brought the matter to the attention of the Commission with the intimation that the allied governments would probably demand the reservation of the whole of this harvest to the civil population. Lord Robert Cecil about the same time gave Mr. Hoover the same intimation.

**Hoover's explanation of the situation.**—Hoover, however, familiar as he was with the situation in the occupied territories and with the attitude of the German authorities, believed that they would never make any such concessions. In a letter to M. Chevrillon on March 18, 1916, he explained the conditions which made the Allies' demands impossible

of attainment. There was no definite form of civil government in France, similar to that in Belgium, which could give and enforce the desired guarantees. There were instead six different armies, each quite independent of the other in its control of the civil population, and all not disposed to act in concert. Even recommendations from the general staff were carried out by the several armies as they saw fit. It would, consequently, be utterly impossible to set up in France any machinery for controlling the native food-supply through the activity of neutrals in the same way as was possible under the civil government in Belgium.

Hoover pointed out also that, so far as the cereal harvest was concerned, the problem was very complicated: that in some areas the Germans themselves planted and harvested the crops; that in other areas they hired French workmen to till the land and advanced them seed and horses to put in the crop; in still other places they advanced seed to the French farmers and tilled his land with their steam ploughs, giving the farmer a right to the share of the crop; and finally, in many cases the peasants raised their own crops without any aid from the Germans. Consequently it was quite impossible to expect that the Germans should agree to give the whole of the harvest to the French population. The allied governments, in response to Mr. Hoover's insistence that they should move slowly in presenting new demands to the Germans, postponed the formulation of their conditions until the middle of the summer, when the whole question of the Commission's work in Northern France would automatically arise, since the subsidies and permits of the Allies for Northern France came to an end on September 1. When the allied governments permitted the increase in the Northern France ration in May, they had stipulated that this increase could be distributed only on condition of the delivery by the Germans of 200 grammes of potatoes per day and per person. But they deferred any detailed demands until the Commission should have made an attempt to secure the concessions desired by negotiation of a more friendly sort than would have resulted from categorical demands of the Allies.

**Hoover presents the matter to the Germans.** While Hoover was in Belgium in March 1916 he sounded the German authorities at headquarters as to the possibility of their increasing the ration allotted to the people of Northern France and the Belgian etape. Before leaving he had written to von Kessler a letter, passages of which have already been quoted,\* suggesting that the Germans should turn over the crops in France and the etapes to the population. He had received little or no encouragement from the Germans, however, to continue his negotiations. It was indeed fairly obvious that the Germans would never yield crops for which they had furnished the seeds, the machinery, and often the labour. Mr. Hoover therefore attempted to secure the modification of the Allies' demands as he did not wish to be compelled to present an ultimatum to the Germans which he knew would be rejected.

**The question of Relief Work in Poland and Serbia.**—During the early months of 1916 the whole question of the feeding of the people of the territories on the western front had become somewhat involved with the question of relief measures in the occupied territories of Poland, Montenegro and Serbia on the eastern front. In a series of negotiations, which had begun in the spring of 1915 and which had continued for over a year, a group of American relief workers, including representatives of the Rockefeller Foundation, the Red Cross, the Commission for Relief in Belgium and the American Embassy in Berlin,

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\* See page 315.

had managed to secure tentative support for a plan to feed the people of Poland and Serbia by an organisation similar to the Commission for Relief in Belgium. The allied governments had made it an indispensable condition, however, in the case of these territories, that the neutral Commission should not be allowed to import food unless the German and Austrian Governments gave the specific guarantee that all native products of the territories in question would be reserved for the civil population. The deficiency between the native crops and the needs of the population could then be supplied through imports of the neutral Commission. The German Government had at first tentatively agreed to this, but the Austrian Government had refused, and in June 1916 the Germans withdrew their permission. For a time it seemed as if the whole of the work of the Commission might be stopped as a result of the general situation which grew out of these negotiations. The Governments, both of the Central Powers and of the Entente countries, had obviously attempted to put the burden of responsibility for the civilian populations of the countries occupied by the Central Powers on the other group of belligerents. In the negotiations, each group was jockeying for a position of vantage from which it could cast discredit on their foes. In the face of such a diplomatic situation the interests of the population naturally suffered. The Germans were so indignant at the conditions demanded by the English for the undertaking of relief work in Poland and Serbia that the more violent elements in Germany demanded that the relief work in Belgium and Northern France should be stopped and that the people should be allowed to starve unless the Allied Powers would give up the blockade and permit food to go to Germany.

**Negotiations with the Allies concerning demands to be made.**—Mr. Hoover, who had taken a considerable part in the negotiations in regard to Poland, had come to be thoroughly familiar with this attitude on the part of the very strong element in Germany. He was, therefore, all the more anxious to avoid having any new and far-reaching demands presented to the Germans as a condition for the continuation of the relief work within Northern France and the Belgian etappe, as he realised that such new demands might endanger the whole work.

On June 13, 1916, M. Chevillon wrote to the London office of the Commission from Paris that the French Government intended to take measures to compel the Germans to turn over the whole French crop to the Commission for the benefit of the French civil population. Chevillon wrote: 'I am at once setting all the influence I can in motion to oppose this, as I know perfectly well that no weapon can be put into your hands to obtain this from the Germans unless it means causing more suffering for the unfortunate populations under German rule. I do not believe the Germans would accept this rule unless the French Government goes to the length of actually stopping all relief. I may say here that the telegram of Mr. Gerard concerning Poland has had the effect of stiffening the French attitude, because the Foreign Office wrongly believes that the Germans have made concessions to the representations of Sir Edward Grey. They therefore consider that a strong attitude is the proper line to take, and that the Germans will also give in as to Northern France if we threaten stoppage of relief unless they allow the full French crop for French needs.'

In a letter of the same date to the French Foreign Office, M. Chevillon had also pointed out that the attitude of Germany toward the provisionment of Poland was not equivalent to the unreserved acceptance of the conditions imposed by the British Government, that there was no reason to believe that a far-reaching demand as to the crop in

Northern France would have a satisfactory response, but that it might endanger the continuance of the relief work. He pointed out that in view of the German participation in the agricultural work in Northern France it seemed certain that the Commission could not obtain the whole of the harvest for the population ; that, further, each time the Commission exacted a new concession from the Germans they always found themselves met with the German argument that only the food blockade was responsible for the lack of food in Belgium and Northern France ; that consequently the occupying authorities had no responsibility for the feeding of the people. Chevrillon said that the rations already obtained from the Germans were, he thought, the maximum which the Commission could obtain ; that the only weapon which the allied governments or the Commission could use to obtain more would be a threat to interrupt the ravitaillement. This would only add to the terrible misery already prevailing in Northern France. It seemed quite unjust to increase their hardships as a mere move in a diplomatic game.

When Mr. Hoover returned from Belgium after his visit of June 1916, he had several conferences with the representatives of the allied governments in regard to the continuation of the work in Northern France. He pointed out that it would be necessary to greatly increase the ration in Northern France, and that it would be better for the allied governments to insist that the supplementary food to be sent in should be handled by the Commission and not by the various independent committees, such as the Swiss committee or the various Dutch and Flemish committees, which had been organised to aid the population of the industrial cities in Northern France.

Mr. Hoover also pointed out that while it was quite impossible that the Germans would grant the whole of the harvest of Northern France to the population, they probably could be induced to very greatly increase the ration which they were contributing to the civil population.

**The Allies present their Demands.**—Finally, in July 1916, Lord Robert Cecil wrote the Commission in behalf of the Foreign Office that the British Government would require that the whole of the harvest in Northern France and the Belgian etapes should be turned over to the civil population under the control of the Commission.

At about the same time the French Government, in thorough accord with Mr. Hoover, proposed that Mr. Hoover should attempt to obtain the whole harvest ; but, as the French Government could not expect such an adversary as Germany to do an act so obviously just, Mr. Hoover was not to be discouraged by a failure to obtain such an assurance, but was to go ahead and get as much of a concession from the Germans as was possible. The French Government intimated that if the Commission secured an additional concession from the Germans it could count on the loyal and complete support of the French Government and would be given increased subsidies for the purchase of food during the winter 1916-1917.

The letter of Lord Robert Cecil was transmitted informally to the Imperial Government at Berlin and to the authorities at the general headquarters. The very idea of such a demand made the officers in touch with the relief work purple with rage. They declared that they dared not even submit such a demand to the higher authorities, as they believed that the higher authorities would immediately stop the whole relief work if informed of this added insolence on the part of the English.

**Dr. Kellogg's Negotiations at the German Headquarters.**—The chief burden of negotiating the new agreement with the Germans fell upon Dr. Kellogg, who was now the director of the Commission at Brussels. At the end of July he took up the questions

at issue with Major von Kessler and the other officers concerned, and soon reached an understanding with them. They declared their willingness to increase the ration of native foods to be allotted by the Germans to the population, provided the General Government at Berlin would give its assent to the measure. The point was emphasised that this should not under any consideration be regarded as a concession made in consequence of the British demand; it was rather to be interpreted as an act of charity on the part of the Germans toward the Belgians. The German officers in Northern France lost no opportunity of impressing this on the representatives. They would never yield to the insolence of a British demand, they said, but out of the goodness of their hearts they would do all they could for the population. The Commission had to continue its negotiations on this basis in order to avert a catastrophe, and the demands of the Allies, that had been informally transmitted, were therefore never officially presented.

**The question of Imports from Holland.**—The question of added food-supplies for Northern France and the Belgian etapes was bound up with another very difficult and knotty problem, that of the disposition of the products of Holland. The British Government had intimated that the Commission should secure in Holland a large percentage of the supplementary foods which the Commission proposed to import for Northern France. Under the agricultural agreement between Holland and England on the one side and Germany and Holland on the other side the Dutch were bound to deliver to the English a certain fixed quantity of meat, fats, and potatoes before any such foods should be delivered to Germany, and, after this fixed quantity had been delivered to England, the balance of the exportations from Holland should be on the basis of 50 per cent. to England and 50 per cent. to Germany. England was able to impose these conditions because their control of the seas made it impossible for Holland to import food or fodder for its animals without the permission of the British Government. The English Government had intimated to the Commission that all supplies bought by the Commission in Holland for export to Belgium or Northern France should be counted from the percentage due to England under the agricultural agreements with Holland.

The Commission, however, had great difficulty in securing from the Germans permission to import food from Holland. The Germans hoped that ultimately they might be able to secure the whole of the excess of Dutch produce for themselves, and consequently they consistently blocked any effort of the Commission to secure importation permits, without definitely refusing such permits. The question of the increased imports for Northern France depended therefore on the Germans granting certain additional concessions as to the native food and also on their giving permission to the Commission to import food-supplies of Dutch origin. Finally, Hoover and Dr. Kellogg met with officials of the Dutch Government and the British Minister at The Hague to make arrangements for the permission to buy food in Holland. It was at this time that a clause was introduced into the agricultural agreement between England and Holland, providing that if the Commission could arrange to get permission from the Germans for imports to Northern France, the quantities so imported could be regarded as a diminution of the part of the Dutch exports due to England. The Germans were shown a copy of this agreement and efforts were made to obtain from them the necessary permission to send food from Holland into the occupied territories.

**Negotiations in Berlin.** To obtain this end, Mr. Hoover and Dr. Kellogg started for Berlin on August 3. They found the Baron von der Lancken and Dr. Rieth, one of his chief assistants in the political department, on the same train. From them Hoover



and Kellogg learned that there was to be a great conference in Berlin over the whole question of food-supplies for the occupied areas. There were to be present at this conference representatives of the general staff, including two or three officers who were known to be friendly to the Commission and representatives of the General Government who were equally friendly.

Hoover and Kellogg realised, therefore, that in their struggle to secure extra food for the people, and especially the children, of Belgium and Northern France they would not be altogether without support from influential German quarters. When they arrived in Berlin one of the first people they met was the officer from Charleville in general charge of all relief matters. He informed them that General Z., the acting quartermaster-general of the German army, wished them to come and take tea with him at his hotel at 4 o'clock.

They called at once on Ambassador Gerard, who had so often given energetic assistance and valuable advice when the Commission was in a tight place. He told them that it would be better for them to make the fight without official governmental assistance and to keep international politics out of it as far as possible. They would have a better chance for success, said Mr. Gerard, if they were to make their representations on the basis of the Commission's standing and influence.

**The Conference with General Z.**— In the afternoon Hoover and Kellogg met von Kessler and Count Wengersky at the hotel of the General. Major von Kessler immediately gave them news of the conference which had just been held. To quote from Dr. Kellogg's report: 'It was startling news and most of it bad. The conference was one of important representatives of the general staff, the General Government of Belgium, the Foreign Office, the Department of the Interior, and all other departments immediately interested in the handling of the civil populations in all occupied territories. It had apparently definitely decided that we could import no Dutch foodstuffs and that no further allocation of the French native crop could be made to the civil population. But these were only incidents in a larger question taken up by it, which was that of the Commission being allowed to continue its work at all. . . . Major von Kessler said things looked very bad for us. Extremely violent speeches had been made against the work and only two or three men had ventured to speak in favour of it. These were, however, men of influence and represented important parts of the government, notably the Foreign Office and the Department of the Interior, but the Reventlow jingoes were in the saddle. A special cause of bitterness was the public dispatch from the British Foreign Minister, which had just been published in all the German papers, demanding that the German authorities turn over to the civil populations in the French, Polish and Serbian territories the entirety of native products of these territories. The bellicose speakers in the conference demanded that the German Government answer this dispatch at once with a curt refusal and with the statement that, as the British blockade was responsible for the food deprivations of the Belgians and French, the ravitaillement should be abolished, the people should be allowed to starve and the allied governments should be held responsible for their starvation. . . .

'The feeling all over Germany was high, and the conference seemed likely to end the Commission's work then and there. Just one ray of light came to us in this dark hour. During our depressing conversation with the headquarters' officers a remark was made by one of them to the effect that if the request for this larger allocation of the native products to the civil population had come simply from the Commission something might have been done, but with England demanding it—"No!" a thousand times "No!"

**The Commission's Plea for Concessions.**—'This was our cue.' We repudiated England. What England demanded was its affair; let the Germans fight it out with England. What the Commission pleaded for was its own affair; the affair of saving the lives of human beings; of keeping body and soul together for 10,000,000 people known to the world as Belgians and French, but known to the Commission as human beings, men, women and children, especially children, crying for food.

'As we were not allowed to attend the conference we had to work outside. We argued with the great headquarters men, we urged upon the representatives of General von Bissing's General Government the consequences to the population for whom this government was responsible, and on the representatives of the Foreign Office and the Department of the Interior the consequences of the position before the world of Germany if German action should cause the terrible tragedy which the abolishment of the ravitaillement would certainly entail. We argued here and pleaded there. And it all had to be done before that fatal conference of the day's length should dissolve.

'The long story must be cut short. We succeeded. The Commission was allowed to continue its work.'\*

**The Agreement with the Great Headquarters.**—Mr. Hoover and Dr. Kellogg were therefore able to leave Berlin with a feeling that once again they had been able in a bitter crisis, by the use of persuasion and moral pressure, to secure the reasonableness of attitude and the necessary concessions which they needed for their work. It was understood that the Germans would permit Dutch food to be sent to Belgium and Northern France. The Germans had likewise tentatively agreed to consider the measure of increasing the ration of flour and potatoes to be distributed in Northern France and the Belgian etapes.

Kellogg was informed that the German general staff had been authorised to make an agreement as to the food-rations for the coming year, and he therefore immediately took up with Charleville the negotiation for these rations.

A conference was held with Major von Kessler on August 19. At this time Kessler gave a provisional and unofficial approval to an agreement by which the Germans would provide 200 grammes of flour and 400 grammes of potatoes, *per capita* per day, to the population (double the quantities of the previous year). On its side the Commission was to agree to secure additional funds from the allied governments and to increase the imports for the population. Von Kessler said that the food-rations he had agreed to turn over to the population would amount to four-fifths of the crop, as the year was a bad one and the harvest had been poor. Kellogg himself estimated it at approximately one-half of the French crop.

**Hoover resumes Negotiations with the Allies.**—As soon as Mr. Hoover learned that the Germans would make this great concession and would double the rations of native food he proceeded to arrange with the allied governments for the continuation of the subsidies and for the securing of the necessary increases entailed by the new program of the Commission. He estimated that the authorised program would cost a total of nearly 33,500,000 francs a month. The reduction in the wheat imports, as a result of the German concessions, would reduce the sum by some 7,500,000 francs, but on the other hand, the Commission would be required to import monthly an additional 2,000 tons of meat and other supplies which would bring the sum needed to at least 33,000,000 francs a month.

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\* Dr. Vernon Kellogg, 'Fighting Starvation in Belgium,' 1918, pp. 61-64.

In order to secure an increase in subsidies, Mr. Hoover left London for Paris on August 24. On the way he stopped at Le Havre and lunched with M. Berryer, Minister of the Interior, and M. Van der Velde, Minister of War. On August 26 he had a meeting at Paris with representatives of the French Foreign Office. Lord Eustace Percy and Lord Granville were also present. They had a long discussion of the situation of the civil population in Northern France. The French recognised the necessity for more food for the people in the north and referred to their constant demands for obtaining it. They expressed the demand of the French Government that there should be a more liberal supply of food for the people of the north. They said that this was the reason why the French had proposed to support relief measures from Switzerland and Holland for supplementing the work of the Commission. A director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the De la Salle Commission for supplying Dutch food to Northern France had been given a credit of 30,000,000 francs; that if the Commission were unable to meet the situation the Government was anxious that the De la Salle Committee should be allowed to operate through the Dutch authorities.

**The question of Competition in Relief Work in Northern France.**—Hoover, in reply, stated the reasons which led the Commission to object to the establishment of other agencies for the import of food. He said that all these negotiations for the establishment of Swiss relief committees with Swiss officers in Northern France, and for imports from Holland, completely undermined the ability of the Commission for Relief in Belgium to protect the people and that it would involve intrigues and invidious rivalry, in which the Commission would refuse to participate. If the French Government was desirous of setting up an organisation of another nationality to carry on the relief work in Northern France, the members of the Commission would be only too delighted. They were in no ways jealous of the activities of other bodies, but were perfectly satisfied that if the contemplated arrangements were completed they would be absolutely fatal to the interests of the people. Whoever was in charge of the relief work must have a complete monopoly in order to deal satisfactorily with the German authorities. Hoover went on to state that the ration on which the Commission was operating was undoubtedly too low, but that the sensible thing to do was not to create other agencies to supplement the Commission, but to put the Commission in such a position with regard to permits, finance and shipping that it would be able to competently care for the people.

The representatives of the British Government also insisted strongly upon the continuance of a monopoly of control in the relief work. They said it would be absolutely impossible to control the food that went into Northern France unless it were all in the hands of one agency. They therefore insisted on the elimination of the other schemes.

**The Allies approve Hoover's Proposals.**—As a result of the conference held on the following days the proposals made by Mr. Hoover as to the continuation of the work of the Commission were definitely approved. A memorandum was drawn up stating the position to be held by the Commission. The French representatives accepted this and said that they would arrange with the Ministers of Finance for an increased subsidy, if necessary of 35,000,000 francs a month.

In this memorandum the Commission stated that it believed the Germans would requisition the whole harvest of native potatoes and cereals, but would turn over 200 grammes of flour per day and 400 grammes of potatoes to the population and would exempt from requisition garden vegetables. The Commission, in order to satisfy the needs of the

population, proposed to supply sufficient foodstuffs to provide a ration to the whole population of a calorific value of 2,170. The additions for the city populations would bring the calorific value of their ration to 2,464.

The new program involved the continuation of the old rations with the following increases:—

Fish :	9 grammes	<i>per capita</i>	per day	for the whole population.
Meat :	50	"	"	"
Butter :	10	"	"	"
Cheese :	20	"	"	"
Cocoa :	10	"	"	"

These increases would represent a tonnage of about 3,530 tons per month. The total cost would be approximately 35,000,000 francs per month after September 1. The Commission insisted very strongly that all purchases made for various regions in the north of France by special committees should be consigned to the Commission for transport, and should be distributed to the whole population for the areas concerned under the control and direction of the Commission. The Commission also insisted that the shipments of foodstuffs thus introduced should be approved by the allied governments and that the price of purchase should not be greater than that obtainable by the Commission for Relief in Belgium. No foreign agent of any other committee was to go into Northern France or to treat directly or indirectly with the German authorities, and all negotiations with regard to the ravitaillement should be conducted with the Germans only through the Commission.

The Commission also offered in the case of a German retreat from any of the occupied areas to step in behind the French lines and to supply the population with food.

The basis of the New Agreements.—While still in Paris on August 30, Hoover received a long letter from Mr. Whitlock, stating that Kellogg had signed an agreement with von Kessler, representing the German great headquarters, to the effect that the Germans would provide 200 grammes of flour per day *per capita* and 400 grammes of potatoes. In addition the Germans had agreed to reserve the vegetables and certain other food-supplies, such as poultry, eggs and rabbits, to the population. The Commission in return agreed to increase the ration of other commodities, especially of fresh meats, preserved fish, butter and cheese.

In writing to Kellogg, Hoover announced that he had succeeded in obtaining an increase in subsidy from the French, so that the Commission would have at least 30,000,000 francs and probably 35,000,000 francs available for Northern France. Hoover proposed to make an announcement that the Commission had entered into an agreement directly with the German general staff providing that they were to contribute additional supplies from the native crops for the population of Northern France. The German authorities had laid great stress on the fact that the agreement was in no way due to the pressure from the English, and they therefore insisted that the announcement of the increased ration should not be made public as being in any way a concession on the part of the Germans. Kellogg, in replying to Hoover, emphasised the fact that his standing at headquarters would be ruined if the English were to announce or publish the agreement as a concession from the Germans to their demands. 'More than that,' said Kellogg, 'I believe the German authorities would denounce the agreement in case of such a step, for, although this condition is not part of the written agreement, it was implied in the verbal arrangement between von Kessler and myself.'

Hoover announced the arrangement made with the Germans in a letter to Lord Eustace Percy of September 4. He pointed out that this arrangement applied to the whole of the Belgian etappen region, as well as to the districts of Northern France, and that it involved the delivery by the Germans to the population of Northern France of 192,000 tons of wheat and to the population of the Belgian etapes of 148,000 tons of wheat, i.e. of 340,000 tons in all as against the 170,000 tons delivered during the year 1915-16. This represented a value at the current market prices of nearly £7,000,000, which the Commission would be enabled to spend on other articles. Mr. Hoover was immediately informed that the agreement was eminently satisfactory to the allied governments; and, accordingly, wrote to Major von Kessler on September 19 confirming the agreement made with Kellogg, and announcing that 7,000,000 to 8,000,000 francs a month would be available for the purchase of supplies overseas in addition to the 20,000,000 francs previously received, and that the Commission would have, further, an undetermined sum at its disposal for the purchase of fresh meat, cheese and butter in Holland. Hoover expressed his appreciation to von Kessler for the spirit of co-operation shown by the German authorities in the matter.

**Arrangements to carry the New Program into effect.** The arrangements having thus been completed for the work in Northern France for the year 1916-17, Hoover drew up a memorandum, on September 20, giving the detailed program of the Commission as then arranged. He stated that in view of the increase of the German ration the Commission would decrease the ration of imported flour to 100 grammes a day from October. The Commission would continue to import 8,000 tons of wheat per month to supply this ration, and would import an additional 2,500 tons for the purpose of preparing supplementary rations of especially prepared food for young children. In spite of the rise in the price of wheat, the Commission would continue to maintain the price at 45 centimes per kilogram in Belgium in order to permit the price of bread to be kept at a maximum figure of 40 centimes a kilogram. The flour delivered by the Germans to the population was to be turned over at a price of 30 centimes per kilogram, and as the bread was made from a mixture of the two flours it would thus be possible to keep down the price of bread to the maximum of 40 centimes per kilogram.

To provide for the special rations to the children, Hoover proposed to use in special factories in Belgium 2,000 tons of wheat, 350 tons of maize products, 100 tons of lard, 370 tons of sugar, 400 tons of rice, 100 tons of cocoa and 100 tons of condensed milk; 1,500 tons of condensed milk was to be imported monthly for direct distribution to the children and the sick, thus bringing the total importation of milk to 1,600 tons per month for the north of France. A total of 350 tons of cocoa was to be imported, of which 250 tons would be distributed to the children and the sick on a basis of 10 grammes per day per person.

**The New Ration in Northern France.**—As soon as the negotiations relative to the Dutch products were completed, Mr. Hoover proposed to provide for a regular importation of meat to the urban industrial communities of France. He hoped to ship 500 tons of dried or salted herrings monthly and to secure regular shipments of cheese and butter to supplement the ordinary rations. The other articles of food-ration were to be continued as before. The Commission planned to import monthly a total of 7,370 tons of rice, beans, peas and maize products, a total of 3,200 tons of bacon and lard, 1,100 tons of coffee, 1,320 tons of sugar and 1,000 tons of soap. This program would provide for distribution to the population of the following ration per day per person:—

THROUGH GERMAN AUTHORITIES :							Grammes.
Flour	..	..	..	..	..	..	200
Potatoes	..	..	..	..	..	..	400
THROUGH C.R.B. IMPORTS :							
Flour	..	..	..	..	..	..	100
Maize Products	}	..	..	..	..	..	100
Beans and Peas							
Rice							
Bacon and Lard	..	..	..	..	..	..	45-50
Sugar	..	..	..	..	..	..	15
Coffee	..	..	..	..	..	..	17
Soap	..	..	..	..	..	..	15
Meat	}	..	..	To be settled as imports can	be arranged.	..	
Cheese							
Preserved Fish							
Butter							

SUPPLEMENTARY RATION FOR CHILDREN AND INFIRM.

Phosphatine	..	..	50 (later 100 grammes) for infants.
Special Biscuits	..	..	50 (later 100 grammes) for children and infirm.
Farine Lacté	..	..	as sent.
Crème de riz	..	..	as sent.
Cocoa	..	..	10 grammes for younger children.
Condensed Milk	..	..	50 grammes for infants, children and infirm.

It was believed that this ration would be ample to keep the population in normal health during the winter. The shipments to the various districts of Northern France were to be made on a basis of the population, with a certain supplement in the case of the more densely populated districts.

**Difficulties in the Delivery of the New Ration.**—For various reasons, however, the full ration contemplated was practically never delivered in France. The grain and potato harvest in Northern France, as in Germany, had been much below the estimates and the Germans therefore refused to live up to the agreement signed by Major von Kessler. Major von Kessler was transferred to Rumania in September and consequently the Commission lost his powerful and intelligent support. For a long time the Germans refused to state definitely exactly what ration they would deliver to the population. The Commission brought all possible pressure to bear, pointing out that the program of imports drawn up by the Commission had been conditional upon the increase by the Germans of the rations which they delivered of flour and potatoes. Ultimately the Germans agreed to provide 180 grammes of flour and 350 grammes of potatoes per day *per capita*. The flour was delivered with fair regularity, although the deliveries for the month of October and November were considerably delayed, but it was quite different with the ration of potatoes. The Germans claimed that Northern France did not produce half enough potatoes to provide the ration and that transportation difficulties made it impossible to ship potatoes from Flanders or from Germany. The Germans contended also that the English attack on the Somme had resulted in the destruction of the harvest in a great part of the agricultural district of the Somme valley, which was one of the most productive of the French territories; for this reason, said the Germans, they had received approximately

only one-half the harvest in Northern France they had expected and that this made it necessary for them to modify their original agreement. Whatever their excuse was, the fact remains that except in the agricultural districts few, if any, potatoes were ever delivered to the population. In the cities like Valenciennes and Lille the total quantity of potatoes delivered amounted to only 30 or 40 grammes per person, instead of 350 grammes as promised. The Commission made repeated efforts to induce the Germans to live up to their promises, but these efforts were more or less resultless.

**Comments of the French People on the Commission's Work.**—The new program as put into effect for Northern France provided a more ample ration than that which the people had previously enjoyed. While not sufficient, of course, to satisfy the demands of the people, it was yet ample to preserve the health of the population. As a whole the people of Northern France very greatly appreciated the work which the Commission had been able to do and the results which it had achieved on their behalf. The agents of the French Government who examined the refugees from Northern France who were allowed to go from the occupied territories via Switzerland to France had little but praise for the Commission as a result of their investigations. Thus, in one report on December 31, 1916, one of these officers wrote that a series of reports which he had gathered from the évacués 'constitutes a striking witness of the good organisation of the Commission and of the efficiency of its work. . . . Almost all the persons whom we questioned, both from the towns and the country, from the middle and the working classes alike, commenced by telling us that the ravitaillement worked well, that the food was of good quality, and that the distributions were impartial and generally regular.'

A still more striking testimonial of the good work accomplished by the Commission in Northern France was that given by the population of the territory left behind in the territory evacuated by the Germans in their retreat of March 1917. The people of Noyon, Ham and Roye, and of the other places in the neighbourhood, all alike gave very flattering tribute to the efficiency of the Commission, which, they declared, had saved them from starvation and worse. The people left behind in the occupied territories were not less prompt in showing to the representatives their gratitude and appreciation for the work which the Commission had done in Northern France during the two years of its work there. When the American delegates finally left France for the last time in February 1917 they carried away with them grateful memories of their relations with the people for whom they had worked. It cannot be emphasised too much and too often that most of the actual work of the ravitaillement was done by the French people themselves. It was they who actually handled the food, who arranged for and carried out the distributions, who spent their time and best efforts, in the face of the most discouraging difficulties, to make sure that their compatriots received their just rations of food. These committees, however loyal and self-sacrificing, were, of course, completely dependent on the importations which the Commission was able to make. It was therefore a source of great satisfaction to them in the concluding months of 1916 to know that the rations had been greatly increased in Northern France by the efforts of the Commission. None of them, of course, could foresee the events which developed in a very short time to put their plans in confusion and to destroy temporarily the results of their efforts.

## CHAPTER XIV

## FORCED LABOUR IN BELGIUM

PRELIMINARY EFFORTS OF THE GERMANS TO SECURE  
BELGIAN LABOUR

The question of Forced Labour in 1916.—It was in the summer of 1916 that it first became evident that the Germans were about to carry out a plan for compelling the Belgian workmen to labour for them. This action had been more or less foreshadowed by previous steps taken by the German Government in Belgium at the instigation of the Imperial Government in Berlin and of the military authorities. But, nevertheless, when the actual deportations of men began, the incidents that occurred were so inhumane and so heart-rending that the civilised world was shocked even by the more or less incomplete and inaccurate reports which were published in the press. These deportations had the gravest influence on the work of the Commission in Belgium, and had it not been for the position which the Commission had come to enjoy, as a result of two years' activity, the whole of the Belgian relief work would probably have been instantly stopped by the allied governments. As it was, the Commission found itself in the greatest difficulty to convince the allied governments that no matter what crimes might be committed by the German authorities the allied governments could do no less than realise their inability to prevent the commission of such crimes and should continue to permit the Belgian population to be fed, in order to prevent the famine which would have attended any stoppage in the imports made by the Commission. In order to illustrate the difficulties imposed upon the Commission by these deportations it will be necessary to review briefly the circumstances and incidents associated with these deportations.

German efforts to secure Belgian Labour defeated by the Commission's Work.—From the time that the Germans occupied Belgium they had consistently endeavoured to induce the Belgian labourers to work for them. In the case of the employees of the Belgian railroads they had made it a crime for anyone to advance or bring in the money due to them from the Belgian Government, hoping in this way, by cutting off their income, to force them to accept work on the railroads and in the machine-shops. But, by one means or another, the great majority of the railroad employees, like every class of labour in Belgium, were able to avoid accepting work from the Germans.

Very early in the Commission's work the Germans had begun to perceive that the operations of the benevolent department of the Comité National seriously hampered the execution of any plan they might have for obtaining Belgian labour. As long as the Belgians had food and clothing they were not likely to agree to work for their hated enemy. The benevolent department of the Comité National and the Commission had taken care to see that no person in Belgium lacked food or clothing. From the first the unemployed workmen were supplied gratuitously with food-rations which, while insufficient,



yet provided enough to enable them to live without accepting employment from the Germans. In April 1915 the Comité National had put into effect the plan for giving unemployment benefits to all unemployed workmen, in addition to the ordinary gratuitous distribution of food. This unemployment benefit greatly supplemented the ordinary relief and gave the average family of the working class ample food on which to live. The Germans soon became greatly exercised over this scheme, as they saw in it the final defeat of any hope they might have cherished of sooner or later securing labour in Belgium through the compulsion of hunger and destitution among the working classes. As a result of the hostile attitude taken by the German authorities in Belgium, the Comité National decided to cease all payments in money and to give the unemployment benefit only in the form of food, as has been already related in Chapter VIII. In that place the crisis in the relations between the Germans and the relief organisations which occurred in the summer of 1915 over the question of distribution of relief has been fully discussed.

The Germans had ultimately to resign their hope of securing labour as a result of the increase of destitution among the labouring classes or by exercising such control over the benevolent department as to prevent the gratuitous distribution of food to unemployed workmen who refused to work for them. It had obviously been the intention of the Germans in the spring of 1915 to secure such control of the relief as to use it to compel workmen to labour for them, but the Comité National and the Commission were keenly alive to the machinations of the Germans in this respect, and were able to bring sufficient pressure to bear, by threatening the stoppage of the whole relief work, that the Germans had finally to give up their scheme and to give the solemn assurance that they would never use the relief to compel the Belgian workmen to labour for them.\*

As a result of the agreements made with the German army at this time it was definitely decided that the whole control of the benevolent department should remain with the Commission and the Comité National and that the Germans should exercise no supervision over it.

**First steps to coerce Belgian Labour.**—But this agreement did not prevent the Germans from still cherishing the hope that by one means or another they would be able to obtain a considerable amount of labour in Belgium. They offered high wages to Belgian workmen who would agree to work for them, and continued in the hope of being able to bring pressure of one sort or another to bear to secure an added amount of labour. They endeavoured to limit the unemployment benefit of the Comité National to as great a degree as possible, taking the attitude that the secours committees should deliver no food to any workman who had refused an offer of employment. Of course, in view of their promise not to compel workmen to labour for them through manipulation of the food distribution, they could not directly order rations to be stopped to workmen who had refused to labour for the German Government or any of its many ramifications, but the Germans seemed to have hoped to evade their promise by using private concerns throughout Belgium who were working for them and by attempting to cut off the food of all idle workmen who would not accept employment from these firms. Thus a decree was published by the Governor-General on August 22, 1915, under date of August 15, which provided, first, that anyone making false declarations as to his personal destitution was liable to imprisonment for six weeks or to a fine of 1,250 francs; second, anyone receiving support from public or private

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\* Letter of von der Lancken to the diplomatic Patrons of the Commission in Brussels, July 29, 1915.

assistance who should refuse without sufficient reason to accept or to continue an employment which had been offered to him and which was suited to his capacities, and who, as a result of such refusal, had become a charge on public or private relief, should be liable to imprisonment for from two to six months. It was provided, however, that any refusal to work justified by international law would be permissible. Third, anyone who knowingly, by extending relief or by other means, encouraged the refusal of labourers to work should be subject to a fine of 1,250 francs, or an imprisonment of one year. If communes, associations or other groups were guilty of thus enticing workmen to refuse employment, the heads of these groups should be considered responsible under the heads of Art. 3. Any moneys which had been destined for the relief of persons refusing legitimate employment should be confiscated and given to the Red Cross. Infractions of this decree were to be tried by the Belgian criminal courts.

**The Lessines case.**—It was not very long before a case arose growing out of the edict just referred to. At Lessines, in the province of Hainaut, there were large stone quarries. Since the beginning of the war the operations of these quarries had been suspended, although the owners and workmen alike declared that they would gladly accept any opportunity to resume work if the products of the quarries should not be used for military purposes. The Germans were very anxious to secure the products of these stone quarries. On August 21 one of the German civil officials at Mons convened the quarry-owners in a special meeting and attempted to get them to resume work. They replied that they would do so if guarantees were given that the products of the quarries would not be employed directly or indirectly for military purposes. The Germans, however, absolutely refused to give any such guarantees. This was, for the quarry-owners, merely a confirmation of their fears that the Germans were attempting to force them to do work of direct military advantage to the Germans. They had also had proof that macadam from Lessines had been shipped to the front. The Germans, however, declared that this refusal to work the quarries constituted a violation of the Governor-General's edict, and the leading quarry-owners were tried and convicted of violations of the decree. On October 25 the quarry-owners of Lessines petitioned the Governor-General, stating that they had refused to work only under the terms of Art. 52 of The Hague Convention and of the first article of the Governor-General's decree of August 15. They assured the Governor-General that they were willing to resume work if a formal promise would be given that the products of the Lessines quarries should not be used for any military purpose, and proposed that citizens of a neutral country should be given the right to control the distribution of the products of the quarries.

The Governor-General replied on November 5, stating that the opposition of the operators and workmen at Lessines to resuming work was not justified by The Hague Convention; that the operators should recognise his efforts to induce the workmen to accept employment and should rather have requested the aid of the military power in forcing the recalcitrant men to work. The Hague Convention did not apply, said von Bissing, for even if the macadam were used exclusively for the repair of important military roads or for the army, this was no reason for refusing, and, he said, 'he would give no guarantee as to the use which might be made of the products of the quarries.' He said finally that 'the penalties imposed at Lessines had his approval and though the maximum penalties prescribed by the edict had been given, this was not too much in view of the stubborn opposition of the offenders.'

**The Eecloo case.** A similar case, showing the intention of the German authorities, occurred in the month of November 1915, when the commandant of the little village of Eecloo issued an order to the chairman of the relief committee that the masons and carpenters named on a list which he provided himself should receive neither shelter nor money nor food, either from the communes or from the communal 'comité de secours,' as long as they refused to accept the work which had been offered them by the German administration. The commandant added that anyone who assisted the persons named would be liable to a money fine of 10,000 marks and to imprisonment; that if the communal council or relief committees gave assistance, the members could be similarly punished. This case was referred to the Comité National and to the patron Ministers, and the German authorities finally yielded, agreeing that, perhaps in this case, the commandant had acted in contravention of the promise given in July.

Throughout the winter of 1915-16 signs of added impatience on the part of the Germans at the failure of their attempt to induce Belgians to work for them became more and more evident. The Germans condemned the Belgians as an idle and shiftless race, because they would not accept the remunerative employment which the Germans offered them and preferred rather to live on charity provided for them by the Comité National. More and more the Germans showed increasing inclination to use their military power to force workmen into their service.

**The Namur cases.**—An interesting case occurred early in February in the province of Namur. The heavy use made of the Belgian railroads necessitated constant repairs and reconstruction of parts of the line. The Germans had very little labour to spare for this purpose and were very desirous of getting Belgian workmen to do the necessary repairing. On January 7, 1916, at Rochefort, fourteen men were summoned to present themselves at Jemelle at the railroad repair and construction shops. Practically all of these men were on the list of the local comité de secours as chomeurs, i.e. they were receiving gratuitously their food. The men gathered, according to instructions, at Jemelle at the time appointed and were offered repair work at 3.60m. a day. Some of the men who were specially qualified were offered positions with higher pay as locomotive drivers, engineers, inspectors, etc. As the men considered that the work demanded was of a direct or indirect military character, they all immediately refused to accept employment. They were put under arrest, stripped and searched, and on continuing to refuse were sent to Dinant and from thence to Namur to prison. They were locked up without any examination and kept until February 25 on a diet of bread and water. On February 25 they were formally tried and condemned to one month's imprisonment, the term of their imprisonment being considered as beginning February 8. They were liberated on March 10. Meanwhile the local committee of secours had been ordered to stop all relief to such of these men as had been on the list of chomeurs, and the committee was forced to comply with the order. Three of the men, on being released, accepted private employment at Namur. The others still refused to work for the German administration. Some of them succeeded in getting other work; others, after some delay, were put back again on the list of those receiving the secours benefit.

About the same time a similar case occurred at Jemelle. Nineteen men of that town were summoned and offered work. Under compulsion they signed a contract agreeing to accept employment, but when they found that the work on which they were to be employed was of direct military importance, they refused to go on with it. They were

sentenced to imprisonment in terms of six weeks each. On being released, a number of them under threats of further imprisonment finally agreed to work and were given labour in the railroad repair shops at Jemelle.

A third case of the same sort occurred at Namur. Twenty-three labourers, for the most part former employees of the Belgian railroads, were asked by the military authorities in the first days of March to accept work in repairing locomotives and railway cars. Up to the time of this request most of the men had received through the Co-operative Loan Society of Brussels a money remittance of  $37\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. of their pre-war salary, with a minimum of 60 francs a month. When the men refused to accept work, the Co-operative Society was prohibited to remit any further money and the men were condemned to imprisonment by the military court of Namur. The German police at Namur at the same time were instructed to visit all former railroad employees in that place, demanding that they should resume work on the railroads and threatening them with punishment if they refused.

### THE BEGINNING OF THE DEPORTATIONS

**Forced Labour in France in 1916.**—These are but samples chosen more or less at random from a great number of similar cases which occurred with increasing frequency during the early months of 1916. Then, in April, came the action of the German authorities in Northern France, already described, in which more than 20,000 people were deported from Lille, Tourcoing and Roubaix and compelled to work for the German authorities, some of them at agricultural labour, but a great proportion in cutting timber, running saw-mills, repairing roads and doing other similar work of direct military importance. Under another pretext, practically all of the able-bodied men of France had in the meantime been gathered into concentration camps as conscripts subject to military service under the French law. They were likewise compelled to work for the Germans and in nearly all cases were put on work of military importance.

**The Decree of May 15, 1916.**—These activities in France under the direct order of the military authorities, and the growing frequency of cases in Belgium similar to those cited above, forced the Commission to recognise that the Germans might soon begin a wholesale policy of forcing Belgian labourers to work. This realisation was hastened by the publication of a decree of the Governor-General on May 20, 1916, under date of May 15. This decree abrogated the decree of August 15, 1915, and provided: (1) that anyone making false declarations as to his destitution should be liable to a penalty of six months' imprisonment or a fine not to exceed 1,000 marks; (2) that anyone who without sufficient reason refused to accept labour fitted to his capacity, and as a result of that refusal became a charge on public or private relief, should be subject to a penalty of from fourteen days to one year's imprisonment. The only legitimate excuse for refusing to work would be one based on international law.

So far the decree had merely reiterated the terms of the previous decree, but it was now provided in addition that infractions of the edict should be punished, not as before by Belgian criminal courts, but by the German military courts. In case of any refusal to work, the military commandants or the Kreishefs should be authorised to order that the recalcitrant unemployed should be conducted by force to places where they would be compelled to work. It was provided that anyone who gave relief or took other steps to

induce labourers to refuse employment should be liable to a penalty of not to exceed 10,000 marks, or of two years' imprisonment.

**The Protest of the British Foreign Office.**—This decree clearly showed the intention of the Germans to force labourers to work if they refused to accept employment offered them by the military authorities. Just as in the previous year, the British Foreign Office solemnly protested against this decree. In a memorandum Sir Edward Grey recalled the condition made in Lord Crewe's letter of July 7, 1915, that in the event of the Germans attempting to use the machinery of the Commission and the Comité National to coerce the working population of Belgium into labouring for them, all agreements between His Majesty's Government and the Commission would at once terminate. The memorandum also referred to the German promise of July 29, 1915, that Belgian workmen would not be compelled to labour for the German army in a manner contrary to the stipulations of The Hague Convention. The Foreign Office stated further that all the stories of German efforts to force Belgians to work for them were confirmed by this new decree of May 15, which provided that workmen could be forced to labour. A long quotation was made from the report of the Commission of Enquiry as to the brutal manner in which the labourers had been snatched from their homes, taken away at the point of the bayonet and given cruel punishment in case of repeated refusals to do the work at which they were set. In concluding, the Foreign Office stated: 'It is presumably useless to urge upon the German authorities the inhumanity of their actions, and His Majesty's Government are therefore reduced to basing their protest solely on the fact that the decree of May 15 is another direct and deliberate infraction of the undertakings of the German Government to the Commission for Relief in Belgium. They have promised solemnly to abstain from all interference in the work of relief and to leave those dispensing it free and untrammelled; yet, openly, by the decrees which they have issued, and, covertly, by the oppressive measures adopted in pursuance of these decrees in all parts of Belgium, they not only leave the population of Belgium to be fed and saved from starvation solely by the efforts of the Allies and the charity of the United States, but also seek to secure that the Belgians should be enforced, by the maintenance thus afforded them, to work for their enemies and thus postpone by their own labour the restoration of their freedom and the independence of their country.'

**Representations by the Commission to the German Authorities.**—The Commission made many representations to the German Government in the matter of the new threat to force the Belgian workmen to labour. The directors of the Commission at Brussels and Mr. Hoover during his visits pointed out unavailingly to the German authorities the terrible effect that such a policy of forced labour would have in the whole outside world and the serious consequences it might have for the continuation of the Commission's work. The local German officials in Belgium declared themselves quite powerless in the matter. The Governor-General himself was undoubtedly opposed to any scheme which practically amounted to an enslavement of the working population of Belgium, and most of the officials with whom the Commission came into contact were similarly personally opposed to the policy. But the high command of the army had decided that, since a greater and greater proportion of working men were being withdrawn from their industries for service at the front, it would be necessary to replace them by workmen from the occupied territories. The high command of the army having taken this decision, the civil officials of the Government in Berlin and the officials of the General Government at Brussels could

do nothing but carry into effect the edict, which seems to have originated from General Ludendorff.

In August 1916 Herr Helfferich, the Vice-Chancellor, in response to a question in the Reichstag from one of the Reventlow party, stated that measures had been taken and would soon be put into effect to secure from the occupied territories both east and west the maximum amount of labour possible. Steps were soon taken in Belgium which showed that Helfferich's promise was to be made good.

**Hoover's investigation of August 1916.**—In August 1916 Mr. Hoover drew up a memorandum of the cases of forced labour which had previously occurred. This reviewed the cases of Lessines, in which nearly 200 employers and workmen had been condemned to imprisonment, and the cases in Namur province already referred to, as well as two or three other similar cases. At the same time, in a letter to Lord Eustace Percy, he pointed out that thus far the deportations and forced labour had not reached any considerable proportions, as the records of the Co-operative Loan and Advance Society showed that out of 80,000 men, former employees of the Belgian State receiving advances from the Society, only 225 had been compelled to work for the Germans and that the greater part of these were in workshops in the etappen region. Even this number of 225 had not all been obliged to work, as some of them had accepted employment of their own free will.

**The preliminary move of the Germans.**—But this state of affairs was not to continue very long. In August and September the Germans made repeated efforts to induce the Belgians to accept work voluntarily. Affiches were put up in all parts of the country asking for skilled workmen of various kinds, and offering high pay to all who would voluntarily accept employment. German agents and renegade Belgians were sent about the country to induce workmen to voluntarily accept work. These agents told of the high wages and splendid treatment the workmen would receive in Germany, and painted the most glowing pictures of the conditions they would find in Germany. They were told of the nice lodgings they would have, and they were informed that they could take their families with them and would be given nice little houses with gardens to live in. They would be paid a minimum of from 5 to 8 francs a day.

In August and September the German military authorities in the Belgian etapes began to take measures similar to those already applied in France. The men of military age were bundled off unceremoniously and compelled to labour. They were half-starved and beaten about until they were bullied into signing an agreement to work of their own free will. Once they had signed such an agreement they were much better treated, given better food and also a certain measure of liberty; so long as they refused to work voluntarily they were kept as prisoners, fed on little but bread and water and brutally punished for their obstinacy in refusing to accept the terms offered by the Germans.

**The Germans demand the lists of Chomeurs.**—In September the Germans took the first decided steps toward a wholesale deportation from Belgium. The burgomasters of the communes were ordered to provide the local commandants with lists of the chomeurs (unemployed) who received help from the commune or from the comité de secours. The burgomasters were notified that if they did not comply with this order they would be punishable by military law. The burgomasters, however, almost uniformly refused to provide any such list of the unemployed in their commune, stating that as a matter of fact they had no such lists in the communal records, that these lists were not official, but were kept only by the comité de secours. This action was taken first in the Flanders. On

September 21 the general commanding the etappen inspection of the 4th army sent the following order to the provincial committee of East Flanders: 'I command the comité provincial de secours et d'alimentation at Ghent to give the order to its sub-committees that the lists of the unemployed and destitute who receive any aid whatsoever from the comité must be handed over, against receipt and promise of return, to the local German military authority at its request. It will not make use of the information for anything which is in contravention with arrangements made by the General Government.'

In Flanders in various communities the lists of chomeurs were forcibly taken from the committees. The Commission protested against these actions of the German authorities, but no heed was paid to their protests.

**Unrest and Terror in Belgium.**—In the first days of October the measures already applied in France and Flanders were begun to be put into effect in the territory of the General Government. The news of the coming deportations of workmen aroused the utmost indignation and rage throughout the whole of Belgium. The people were filled with terror at the threat of the events which they generally felt to be approaching. Delegations were sent from all over Belgium to the Comité National and the American and Spanish Ministers asking that they take some steps to check the German activity. The Germans in Brussels connected with the General Government seemed to feel that as a result of the commencement of deportations in Belgium the Commission might cease its importations of food. The officials of the Vermittlungsstelle were tremendously exercised, as they were apparently encharged with working out measures to be taken by the German authorities for the provisionment of the Belgian population in the event of the importations of the Commission being stopped. Several of the officials were summoned to Berlin, and came back accompanied by a special committee for the Imperial Government to study the situation and to determine what should be done if the Comité National and the Commission for Relief in Belgium should discontinue their work. It appeared that they proposed to turn the local responsibilities over to the local authorities and to use the harvest commissions as a new German-Belgian food committee. It may well have been also that these measures on the part of the Germans were due to a warning that the submarine warfare would soon be resumed with all restrictions abandoned, and that measures should be taken to counteract the result of the probable intervention of America in the war. In such case, by controlling themselves the whole operations of relief, they would be able to compel every single Belgian workman to choose between labouring for them and starvation.

**The Deportations and the Relief Work.**—The question of what the Commission should do when the Germans should begin to put into force their policy of forced labour and to make deportations was one which very gravely concerned the Commission and the allied governments. It was obvious that the allied governments would not for a moment permit the Commission to feed workmen compelled to work for the Germans. Some of the opponents of the Commission in England redoubled at this time their criticisms of the whole principle of permitting imports of food for Belgium, and a series of questions were asked in the House of Commons which formed a menace to the existence of the Commission itself. The Foreign Office remained friendly to the Commission, but it became evident that certain definite restrictions would have to be made in view of the forced labour problem.

**The action taken by the British Foreign Office.**—In one of his answers to questions in the House of Commons, Lord Robert Cecil declared that the Commission worked on the following principles:

- (1) It supplies nothing to any German civilian ;
- (2) It supplies nothing but bread to any Belgian who earns enough to feed himself from native supplies ;
- (3) Any labourer working for the Germans under coercion must be entirely maintained by the Germans without any assistance whatever by the Commission.

In a letter of October 20, Lord Eustace Percy informed Hoover that he should take this as a direction to the Commission as to the policy to be followed in Belgium. He said that if deportations took place 'it did not matter whether the workmen were sent to Germany or to other parts of the occupied territory, since, under the third rule set out above, you will have no responsibility for them. If, therefore, deportations take place on any large scale under any general decree of the Governor-General, it will become necessary to consider whether your importations should be proportionately reduced and, as it will be impossible for us here to judge accurately the extent to which any such decrees are being enforced at any given moment, it will become necessary for us, in order to meet the pressure of public opinion here, to make a rough general reduction in your rations, probably out of all proportion to the actual number of workmen coerced.'

He said further that the reports from Belgium indicated that all coercion of labour was to be based on the criterion that men receiving relief from the Commission were liable to be coerced, and that hence a workman rendered himself liable to enslavement by the mere fact of receiving relief by the Commission or the Comité National. Lord Eustace Percy declared : 'This is clearly equivalent to the use of your relief as a means of coercing workmen against conscience and therefore constitutes a clear and deliberate violation of the German guarantees.'

**The beginning of the Deportations in Belgium.**—Early in October the Germans took action in the territory of the General Government, which showed conclusively that nothing would stop them from carrying out with the utmost brutality the demand of the Imperial Government that the labour supply of Belgium should be forcibly drawn upon for the aid of the German industry.

In the province of Luxembourg the public works which had been established by the comité provincial to give labour to the unemployed were stopped by order of the German authorities. Further orders prohibited the men thus thrown out of employment from seeking other work from private persons. Practically the only employment left open to them was that offered by the German military authorities, who made every effort to induce the workmen to accept the offers made. Behind these offers in the Luxembourg, as previously in the Belgian etapes, was the scarcely veiled threat that if the men did not voluntarily accept the employment offered they would be taken forcibly and compelled to labour.

At Tournai, which had just been put into the etapes, an even more serious situation developed. Just as in the Flanders, large numbers of men were summoned to work for the military authorities. When the men refused they were put into internment camps, held practically prisoners and given only bread and water.

**The Germans dictate to the Relief Committees.**—The Belgian relief committees were informed that they could provide the bread allowed to these men, but could not furnish any of the other articles of the regular ration. As a director of the Commission in Belgium wrote at the time : 'If the Comité National and the Commission for Relief in Belgium should accept this situation without protest, they would be permitting an



indirect infraction of the undertaking between the Governor-General and the protecting Ministers and would even be a party to the punishment, by the limitation of the food-ration, to these Belgian men.'

During the first weeks of October also the German authorities in many parts of the General Government called upon the communes and local relief committees to deliver up the lists of chomeurs receiving the unemployment benefit. The obvious intention was to use these lists in compelling those receiving relief to labour in the service of the German army. A considerable number of burgomasters and local committee-men were arrested and deported to Germany for refusing to furnish these lists.

## THE DEPORTATIONS AND THEIR RESULTS

**The effect of the Deportations on Public Opinion.**—This situation raised an unparalleled storm of protest throughout the whole press of the allied and neutral world. This indignation expressed by American papers exceeded all previous limits in the condemnation of the German Government for the policy thus denounced as a practical enslavement, in the twentieth century, of a highly civilised industrial population.

**Cardinal Mercier's Protest.**—In Belgium itself practically every responsible Belgian authority protested. The Archbishop of Malines, Cardinal Mercier, already an heroic figure because of his firm resistance to the Germans, wrote a protest to the Governor-General which was a scathing condemnation of the deportations. He recalled the early promises of the Germans that the people of Belgium would not be called upon by the German authorities to do anything repugnant to their patriotic instincts \* and referred also to the promise given by the Governor of Antwerp in October 1914, after the capture of that city, that the men would never be compelled to work for the Germans or impressed into the German army. He continued: 'Now your Government drag from their homes the workmen who have been reduced, in spite of themselves, to unemployment. It separates them violently from their wives and their children and deports them to the country of the enemy. Many workmen have already suffered this unhappy lot, many more are threatened with the same violent fate.

'In the name of liberty of the home and liberty of labour of the Belgian citizens, in the name of the inviolability of families, in the name of the moral interests so gravely compromised by this regime of deportations, in the name of the word given by the Governor of Antwerp and by the Governor-General, immediate representatives of the highest authority of the German empire, I respectfully beg your Excellency to withdraw these measures of forced labour and deportation and to return to their homes those who have already been deported.'

**Von Bissing's Reply.**—But the Governor-General replied to this protest of Cardinal Mercier in the same cynical way that he replied to all the similar protests. He declared that the unemployment in Belgium was due to the fact that the blockade of the Allies had cut off all imports and exports from Belgium and that this had resulted in the cessation of industry; that Germany was responsible for the moral condition of the Belgian workmen and was very solicitous about the effect upon them of the long period of idleness during

\* Proclamation of the Governor General von der Goltz, September 1914.

which they had been supported by charity. He said that the Germans had not interned the male population between 17 and 50 as they had the right to do, but that they were only attempting to provide work for the people who could no longer find employment in Belgian industries. He said that the men who had been deported to Germany had been well treated, and were allowed to take their families to Germany or to send money home. He said further that the people of Belgium had themselves understood the good intentions of the Germans, as tens of thousands had gone of their own free will to work in Germany. He concluded by saying that this provision by Germany of employment for Belgian labour was of mutual benefit to the two countries, as hundreds of thousands of men were without work in Belgium, while in Germany labour was greatly needed. 'It became a duty, as much from a social point of view as an economic one, to employ the unemployed Belgians on productive labour in Germany, a duty necessitated by the community of interests. If there are objections to be raised to this state of affairs they should be addressed to England, who, by her policy of isolation, has created the situation.'

**Hoover's attitude toward the Deportations.**—This is not the place to go into the long story of the deportations or of the innumerable protests which these deportations called forth. It is only desired to present a brief sketch of the situation because of the close relation which inevitably existed between the Commission's work and the problem called into existence by the deportations. As Hoover wrote to Minister Whitlock on November 8: 'Reports this morning from all over the country show the seizure of men right and left, regardless of whether or not they were employed, and including members and employees of local committees. I fear it is the beginning of the end. It is worth your considering uttering a full and strong protest with all the vigour of which you are so capable. This is a greater issue to the Belgian people than anything since the invasion and they look to you as to America for some strong action. It may result in nothing, but it will have put the American stamp on it in indelible terms, and if we do nothing else for Belgium we will go down in a blaze of indignation at this, its worst of many trials since the first agony.'

**The Deportations begin in earnest.**—After the Germans had exhausted their expedients to induce or coerce the Belgian workmen into voluntarily entering their employment, without any appreciable success, the deportations immediately began. It would be impossible to describe in too strong terms the brutality and sickening inhumanity of these deportations. The Germans, unable to secure the lists of chomeurs from the local committees, used this as an excuse to seize men indiscriminately, regardless whether or not they were employed. Each Kreischef and each provincial governor was instructed to carry out the deportations in his own way, and consequently there was a tremendous variation in the manner in which the deportations were carried out in the different provinces. In some districts the local German authorities made considerable efforts to distinguish between the unemployed and those who had never been dependent on charity. In others they took the men indiscriminately, paying heed only to whether or not the men looked as if they might be capable of hard labour. In many of the places practically none of the chomeurs or unemployed were deported, but the men taken were skilled labourers who had never missed a day's employment since the period of invasion had passed.

**The Commission's efforts to protect Belgians engaged in Relief activities.**—As soon as the Commission perceived that the Germans intended to begin wholesale deportations, they made special representations to the German authorities in regard to the members

of the local relief committees and to the employees of these committees, insisting that if any of these men should be deported the whole relief work would be thrown into confusion and the result might be the forced suspension of relief activities. The *Vermittlungsstelle* gave to the patron Ministers and to the Commission the solemn assurance that the members and employees of the local relief committees would not be deported. The Commission thereupon printed, in German, cards which were signed and stamped by the Commission's delegates and given to all members and employees of the relief committees, certifying that the bearer of the card was so employed and was not a chomeur.

But the Germans in the provinces who carried out the deportations paid little heed to these cards or to the assurances given to the Commission. In some places they openly showed their contempt for the Commission by tearing up the cards and deporting practically all men who bore such cards. This happened at Arlon and other places in the Luxembourg, and also in certain places in Namur and in other provinces.

The Commission promptly protested in every case in which a member or employee of a local relief committee was deported. In some instances the protests were heeded and the men concerned released or returned from Germany, but in other cases no such action was ever taken. The General Government and the *Vermittlungsstelle* continued to declare that the men connected with the relief organisations would not be deported, but the commandants in the provinces seemed to pay but little heed to these assurances of the General Government.

**The manner in which the Deportations were made.**—In general the deportations were made in somewhat the following manner. All the men of a commune or a group of communes would be ordered to appear at a railroad station on a certain day and hour with their package of personal belongings ready for deportation. They would then be examined at the railroad station by German officers or under-officers, who sometimes called in the burgomaster and the village priest to furnish information about the various men, but who often acted arbitrarily without any such consultation. As the men came in line to the table at which the German officers were seated, they would be required to present their certificates of identity. If this card had been already stamped by some German authority certifying that the man was already employed, he would usually be dismissed. If his card was not so stamped, the officer would cursorily glance over his papers, size up the man to judge if he were capable of hard physical labour, and then would arbitrarily order him to pass on to the train for deportation or to leave the station free. These deportations were enforced by detachments of German soldiery, who kept at bay with fixed bayonets and machine guns the waiting and weeping crowd of women, children and old men who always gathered about the stations to watch with bated breath to see what fate would be meted out to their fathers, husbands, sons and brothers.

The Americans, who sometimes were allowed to be present at these requisitions of men, probably never witnessed more pathetic spectacles than those which occurred at the times of these deportations. They never realised so fully the impersonal cruelty of the German military regime and their helplessness to render effective service to the Belgian people in this hour of great need. Certainly the memory of those scenes in which husbands were torn from their wives, fathers from their children, at the point of the bayonet, and shoved on to a train for an unknown destination will not soon fade from their minds.

**The dispositions of the Deportees.**—The trainloads of deportees were sent

sometimes to Germany, sometimes to the occupied territory in Northern France. The men were employed in mines and factories in Germany, or in saw-mills and road and trench-making behind the lines in France. Unless the men signed an agreement to work voluntarily after being deported, their treatment continued to be thoroughly brutal. They were insufficiently fed, beaten and mauled about on the slightest provocation and compelled at the point of a bayonet to do hard physical labour. In spite of this, a great proportion of the deported Belgians gave further proof of the stubborn heroism of their race by refusing to sign any agreement to work voluntarily. The result was that hundreds of the men died of under-nutrition and ill-treatment in Germany and in Northern France. After a time the Germans began to send back to Belgium trainloads of men who had stubbornly refused to work and whose physical condition had become such that they were incapable of any further labour.

**The Return of the Deportees.**—If anything the sight of these returning deportees was even more tragic than had been the scene of the deportation itself, for these men came back pale, emaciated and sometimes maimed. Quite usually a number of them would die on the train before reaching their home and their bodies would greet the anxiously awaiting relatives. Many of them had to be sent to hospitals in Belgium for many weeks' treatment before they became even a shadow of their former selves. It was a tragic and pathetic spectacle to see these trainloads of men, who had suffered frightful agonies in standing by their patriotic convictions, received at home by their families and friends who had often been for weeks without news of them.

The whole episode of the deportations was a tragic failure so far as contributing an important addition to Germany's available labour supply was concerned. At the same time, all the work of two years of the General Government in attempting to conciliate the feelings of the Belgian people was made of no avail, for these deportations brought home to the individual family as nothing else could the meaning of German rule. The hatred that was aroused among the mass of the people in Belgium by these deportations passes any description. If the Germans had been deliberately trying to set the public feeling of the country against them for all time, to leave in the minds and traditions of the Belgian people an undying hatred for Germany and the Germans, nothing could have been more effective than these deportations.

**The protest of Public Opinion against the Deportations.**—The deportations continued throughout practically the whole of November without cease. Nothing seemed to be able to stop the complete execution of the policy. The Germans apparently had had the intention of taking 250,000 men from the country. During October and November some 40,000 men were probably deported. The members of the Commission in Belgium grew more and more indignant and outraged as the deportations proceeded. They felt that something had to be done, if possible, to stop the deportations. Hoover therefore intervened and urged upon the neutral Governments the necessity for a prompt intervention. As he pointed out in a cablegram to New York: 'I am informed that the German authorities expect to take 250,000 labourers from Belgium and Northern France. The whole deportation is accompanied by the greatest suffering. The German authorities have apparently carefully weighed the possibility that this might result in breaking down the Relief, but have determined to proceed in any event. We can see no hope in its suppression except by the pressure of public opinion and by protests from neutral Governments.'

**The Allied Governments Protest.**—On December 4, 1916, the allied governments

issued an appeal to the world in the matter of the Belgian deportations. This was in the form of a statement of the British Foreign Office which had been approved by and was issued with the concurrence of the French, Russian and Italian Governments. These Governments, as allies of Belgium, made the following declaration :

The Foreign Office issues the following statement :—

The Belgian Government have solemnly protested to the civilised world against the slave raids conducted by the German authorities in Belgium.

The Allies of Belgium associate themselves with that protest, and, further, desiring to place on record their sense of the debt which they owe to her, unite in making the following declaration :—

When the sudden invasion of Belgium, long prepared by the Central Empires, attained its temporary success, the Allies agreed that the provisioning and maintenance of the Belgian people remaining in the occupied territories was a duty overriding all considerations of immediate military interests. When, therefore, the Belgian Government set on foot the work of relief, and entrusted it to a neutral Commission for Relief in Belgium, the allied governments pledged themselves to the support of that Commission.

As soon as the financial resources of the Belgian Government were exhausted, the Allies provided sums for the continuation of the work. They have furnished the Commission with shipping and all other necessary facilities. Further, they have done their utmost through the neutral Commission to protect Belgian industry from the disastrous consequences of invasion. They have facilitated exports to neutral countries and the transmission of funds to Belgium for wages and for the upkeep of factories. They have repeatedly made offers to the Germans which would have further promoted Belgian industry and trade under the care of the neutral Commission, and would have allowed the importation of raw materials into Belgium. But these offers have met with no reply.

The Allies call this to mind, not as taking credit to themselves but in order to show what has been their consistent policy. They have laboured to protect Belgium so far as possible from the effects of the war, and they sought no advantage for themselves from this policy, since they have, through the Belgian Government, entrusted its execution solely to a neutral Commission which had consistently refrained from assisting either belligerent and has acted solely in the interests of the civil population of Belgium.

The Allies have only stipulated that the Germans should equally draw no advantage from the operations of the Commission ; that they should not seize either imported or native supplies and that the distribution of relief should not be used for the purpose of coercing Belgian workmen against their conscience.

These conditions, which the Germans have pledged themselves to obey, have, in the past, been frequently violated : Belgian cattle have been driven out of Belgium to feed the German armies at the front, Belgian workmen have been coerced, and seizures and requisitions of foodstuffs have taken place throughout the occupied territories. The Germans have also seized raw materials, machinery, and all the property of Belgian factories, essential to the maintenance of the national industry, and have thus deliberately created unemployment and misery.

But these infractions of the German guarantees have in the past been disavowed in many cases by the German Government, and the Allies were content to rely upon the neutral Commission to watch over and enforce the fulfilment of the conditions under which it worked.

Now, however, the situation is changing. The Germans have abandoned all pretence of respecting personal freedom in Belgium. They have deliberately ordered the suspension of public relief works supported by the neutral Commission and have openly, in spite of all professions to the contrary, aimed at creating the unemployment which would furnish them with an excuse for deportations. They have become themselves the 'organisers of and co-operators with man-hunts,' which they solemnly pledged themselves by the Brussels Convention of 1890 to put down in Africa. Further, the machinery of Belgian industry has now been totally destroyed, and the export from

Belgium of foodstuffs essential for the maintenance of the population has again begun on a large scale.

The Allies must therefore warn the world of what is about to take place. As their own situation grows more desperate, the Central Empires intend to tear up every guarantee on which the work of the Relief Commission rests. They intend to cast aside all their promises and to use Belgian foodstuffs and Belgian labour to support their own failing strength. The work of relief which neutrals have built up for two years is about to lose its foundation and is in danger of falling.

The Allies do not intend to change their policy or to desert the oppressed population of Belgium in this most critical moment of the war, but as it will be impossible for the relief work to continue if its basic guarantees are destroyed, they appeal to the civilised world, not on their own behalf, but on that of innocent civilians who cannot protect themselves, to see that this great work of international benevolence and co-operation which has grown up in the midst of war, and for which the Allies have advanced the money, shall not be endangered by treachery or destroyed by violence. But they would remind the world that the German policy which now stands revealed is being carried out not only in Belgium, but in Northern France and in all the occupied territories.

For their part, the Allies pledge themselves not to seek, in the future any more than in the past, any advantage from the operations of this purely neutral Commission.\*

**The Protest of the United States.**—In the meantime the indignation in America, combined with the representations made from American diplomatic representatives abroad, led the American Government to issue a solemn protest. This was cabled on November 29 to the American Charge d'Affaires in Berlin. It stated: 'The Government of the United States has learned with the greatest concern and regret of the policy of the German Government in deporting from Belgium a portion of the civilian population for the purpose of forcing them to labour in Germany, and is constrained to protest, in a friendly spirit, but most solemnly, against this action, which is in contravention to all precedents and to those humane principles of international practice observed by civilised nations in the treatment of non-combatants.

Furthermore, the Government of the United States is convinced that the effect of this policy, if it is pursued, will in all probability be fatal to the Belgian relief work so humanely planned and successfully carried out, a result which would be generally deplored and which, it is assumed, would seriously embarrass the German Government.'

**The action of the Germans.**—Just at this time the German Government was preparing to issue its offer of peace. No more unfavourable atmosphere for the reception of such an offer could possibly have been contrived than that created by the deportations. The German Government seems to have awakened to this fact, for the deportations were greatly diminished in the last days of December. Although other men were occasionally taken afterwards, there were no more wholesale seizures of the sort that had occurred in October and November. At the same time the Germans gave new assurances to the Commission that the employees and members of the local relief committees who had been deported would be returned. A total of nearly 1,100 men had been taken who had been in the service of the relief organisations. As the Germans required that each case should be taken up individually, it made it practically impossible to secure immediate and prompt action. The Germans themselves seemed to have made no serious effort to return the men in question.

**Hoover's Report on the Deportations.**—At the end of December, Hoover received

\* *The Times*, December 5, 1916.

from the State Department a request for information regarding the deportations and as to whether they had been discontinued. On January 2 he replied in a long cable, addressed to President Wilson, stating that there had been no apparent change in the German policy, as the deportations continued. He said that the assurances given to the President that only unemployed were taken and that the deportees were not employed on military work or brutally treated were absolutely untrue. He said that he was convinced that America should protest against the very act of forced deportation as a violation of the most primary human liberty and should not confine herself to protesting against certain classes of men being deported. He suggested that a renewed protest should be delivered, perhaps in the form of a private message from the President to the Emperor of Germany, pointing out that in view of the deportations any effort for peace would fail, as the deportations and the surrounding circumstances was one of the strongest stimuli to the resolution to continue the war among the populations of the Entente countries. If Germany was genuinely anxious for peace, she could scarcely hope for any sympathetic sentiment abroad until the total cessation of the deportations had been proclaimed and the deported Belgians and French returned to their homes. At the same time Hoover informed the President that the allied governments would not stop the relief as a consequence of the deportation as they were convinced that the stoppage of relief would be no remedy and would only accentuate the misery.

**The Deportations continue.**—In spite of all efforts on the part of the Commission and the American diplomatic representatives the deportations were, however, continued, although not in the same way as during the first two months. The later deportations were much more carefully made and a real effort apparently was made to distinguish between the unemployed and those who were occupied in Belgium. In the later deportations, also, most of the brutality which had characterised the earlier ones was meticulously avoided. This was the situation when diplomatic relations between the United States and Germany were broken and the American delegates were forced to leave the occupied territories. Since that time the Germans have apparently continued their policy of enslaving, so far as possible, by forcible means the labour supply of Belgium.

**The German Plan to continue the Provisionment of Belgium.**—It seemed quite certain that the stoppage of the relief work would not have prevented the Germans from carrying out the deportations. They seemed to have made up their minds to the deed and to have counted the cost beforehand. At least an incident which occurred in December tends to show that the Germans were ready for all emergencies, and even for the withdrawal of the Commission and the stoppage of food imports. They had worked out a complete plan of their own for continuing the provisionment of the Belgian people. This was revealed during the Christmas holidays by a curious incident. The civil governor of the province of Liège went home on a vacation, leaving his office in the charge of a subordinate, unacquainted with the work. A day or two after he had gone the subordinate discovered on his desk sets of instructions to burgomasters and proclamations to the people announcing that the importations of food by the American committee had been stopped; that henceforth the German Government would itself take the responsibility for distributing food to the people; that the Comité National and the provincial committees had ceased their work and that their place as central and provincial bodies would be taken by the Crop Commissions; and that the responsibility for the distribution of food to the people would be placed upon the communal administrations. It was announced that the bread-ration

would be immediately reduced to 250 grammes and that measures would be taken to similarly reduce all the other rations. The subordinate official, believing that these instructions and proclamations had been held up by mistake, and impressed by the seriousness of the situation created by the withdrawal of the American Commission which he found announced in these instructions and proclamations, sent out to several of the communes sets of these papers. They were actually put up by the burgomasters of three communes before the news of what was happening reached the Commission and the higher German authorities. The proclamations were at once withdrawn, but not before they had fallen into the hands of the Commission, and so it was that the Commission learned the details of the German plan for continuing the work in case the Commission should withdraw. The German plan would have reduced the Belgian people to a starvation ration. All the native food-supplies, such as meat and the produce of the soil generally, would probably have been drawn on to supplement the German food-supplies and only sufficient would have been left to the people of Belgium to have kept them alive.

**The continuance of the Commission's Work.**—But fortunately the Belgian people were spared this further trial. Although the Commission could not stop the deportations, it could prevent the results of more than two years' efforts being destroyed by the discontinuance of its work. The allied governments loyally supported the Commission in this matter and therefore, even though the deportations continued, even though diplomatic relations were broken between the United States and Germany, even though most of the American representatives left the occupied territories on the eve of the declaration of war, the food purchased and transported by the Commission to Belgium has continued to flow into the unhappy people of the occupied territories and to save them from the worst consequences which would have fallen upon them if the Commission had discontinued its food shipments.

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## CHAPTER XV

## DIFFICULTIES WITH THE COMITÉ NATIONAL IN 1916

## PRELIMINARY DIFFICULTIES ARISING FROM THE WORK OF INSPECTION AND CONTROL

**The Supervision of Food Distribution.** It has been pointed out in a previous chapter that before the organisation of the Department of Inspection and Control the Comité National and the provincial committees had put into effect various kinds of supervision of food distribution. These operated under their exclusive control and the delegates of the Commission had no jurisdiction over them. When Mr. Hoover came to Belgium in October 1915 he informed M. Francqui and the director of the Commission of the increasing criticism of the Belgian relief work in Great Britain as a result of reports of leakage of food-supplies to the Germans and of the violation by the Germans of their agreements in regard to native crops. M. Francqui had thereupon made new efforts to reorganise the work of inspection and control, but still planned to keep this whole work under the exclusive direction of the Belgian committees.

In January 1916, however, new demands of the Foreign Office, and their attitude that they could accept no supervision except that of the Commission, compelled Mr. Hoover to recognise that the Commission must participate in and direct the supervision of food distribution. When the matter was brought up with M. Francqui he at first strenuously objected to the Commission taking any part in the work of inspection and control. He insisted that the Comité National was perfectly able to perform this work itself and that there was no occasion for interference by the Commission. He finally had to yield, however, to the representations made by Mr. Hoover, who knew that the whole work of ravitaillement might be stopped by the British unless the Commission itself was able to assure the allied governments that the Germans were maintaining their guarantees and that there were no considerable leakages of foodstuffs in Belgium.

**The Agreement of February 1916.**—The result was the drawing up of the agreement of February 1916 for the establishment of a department of inspection and control under the joint direction of a representative of the Comité National and a representative of the Commission. The organisation of this department of inspection and control and its operation has been described in a previous chapter. It is only necessary to note here that under the agreements made in February between Mr. Poland and M. Francqui the Commission was to have an equal voice with the Comité National in all matters of inspection and control, and the American delegates in the provinces were to participate in the direction of the provincial distribution services.\*

**Francqui objects to Control by the Commission.**—M. Francqui, however, objected to having the Commission playing an active part in Belgium and contended that the whole control of distribution should rest with the Comité National. His feeling in the matter

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\* See pp. 264-6.

was shown at the end of February when he went to London in company with the Marquis de Villalobar, ostensibly to make certain financial arrangements.

On arriving in London he went directly to the various Government officials without calling upon the assistance of Mr. Hoover or informing the Commission as to the object of his negotiations. It soon appeared that he was in reality attempting to obtain from the British Government an official recognition of the Comité National as the head of the relief work in Belgium and the responsible agent whose assurances could be accepted by the English Government in regard to the carrying out of the program of relief work.

**Hoover proposes the withdrawal of the C.R.B.**—As soon as Mr. Hoover learned of the tack which M. Francqui was taking, he immediately wrote to the American Ambassador offering to withdraw from the work of relief and to turn over the whole responsibility to the Comité National. He explained to Ambassador Page that the Comité National was apparently attempting to cut the ground from under the Commission, and that it was apparently the desire of the Belgian people that the Comité National should assume the sole direction of the relief work. The time had therefore arrived when the Commission should take steps looking to the immediate dissolution of its organisation. At a meeting of the American members of the Commission in London on February 23, Mr. Hoover's attitude was approved and a joint letter was drawn up to the American Ambassador stating that the Commission proposed to withdraw from the work of Belgian relief and to turn it over to the Comité National and to such agents as it chose to appoint outside of Belgium.

**The Foreign Office objects.**—As soon as the British Foreign Office got wind as to what was going on they objected most strenuously to any suggestion that the Commission should withdraw from the relief work. They pointed out emphatically to the Spanish Minister and to M. Francqui that the sole condition under which the British Government would permit imports to go into Belgium was the exercise of a complete control of all relief operations by the Commission.

Perhaps as a result of this objection, Francqui, in a letter of February 26 to the American Ambassador, stated that the work of the Commission for Relief in Belgium had always been indispensable to any relief operations in Belgium, and therefore protested against the suggestion that the Commission should be dissolved. He said: 'It would be absolutely impossible for us to continue the provisioning and assistance of the Belgians without the active leadership of Mr. Hoover. I insist, therefore, that in my name, in the name of my colleagues and that of all my fellow-countrymen, your Excellency should use your kind influence on Mr. Hoover to induce him to abandon the idea set forth in his letter of the 24th. The harmony which has never ceased to exist between the Commission for Relief in Belgium and the organisation which I direct in Belgium is to-day too intimate to allow of any blow being struck at either without the risk of destroying the whole organisation of both. I feel obliged to inform your Excellency that it would be impossible for me to continue for one moment, without the co-operation of Mr. Hoover, to carry on the work which he and I have assumed.'

**Sir Edward Grey's view of the position of the C.R.B.**—The position of the Foreign Office was made clear in a letter written by Sir Edward Grey to the Marquis de Villalobar on February 28. Sir Edward Grey informed the Marquis that the British Government looked to Mr. Hoover for advice as to all matters having to do with the relief work, as he, 'in his capacity as head for the Commission for Relief in Belgium is the only person directly

and personally responsible for the manner in which the whole work both inside and outside of Belgium is carried on. If I may express one further hope, it is that all parties concerned in this matter, realising the impossibility of holding personally responsible either the diplomatic representatives of the neutral powers or the citizens of a noble and unhappy country under foreign domination, will take into full account the heavy burden of responsibility resting on this great neutral Commission and will in every possible way lighten that burden by making its responsibility as easy to discharge as possible.'

This attitude of the Foreign Office was even more clearly expressed in a letter of Sir Edward Grey to the American Ambassador written on March 13, in which the British Foreign Minister said :

'I quite appreciate the desire of the Commission to divest themselves of the burden entailed by this work, which they have borne for so long, but I must state clearly that His Majesty's Government can only allow the work of relief to continue if the entire responsibility for it both inside and outside Belgium is borne by neutrals who, having complete freedom to come and go and having no official position limiting their personal liability, can in fact be held responsible for the carrying out of the various conditions upon which His Majesty's Government have insisted. The American Commission is the only organisation which fulfils these requirements, and His Majesty's Government therefore feel obliged to insist that either the whole work should cease or the American Commission shall continue to direct it as heretofore.'

As a result of this attitude of the British Government any idea of eliminating the Commission from the relief work was promptly abandoned. Francqui and the Marquis de Villalobar devoted the rest of their stay in London to an effort to reach an understanding with the British Government as to the nature of the guarantees to be demanded of the Germans for the protection of Belgian native produce. These negotiations culminated in the guarantees finally given by the Germans in the letter written to the patron Ministers in Brussels on April 14 by the Baron von der Lancken.

**Francqui's attitude toward the C.R.B.**—The Commission's position had been strengthened rather than weakened by this episode, for Francqui and his colleagues had learned that, from the standpoint of the British Government, only one organisation was recognised in connection with Belgian relief and that was the Commission for Relief in Belgium. M. Francqui accordingly did everything he could to smooth over the impression created by his first activities and begged Mr. Hoover and the Commission to continue their work.

**The Commission agrees to Continue its Activities.**—In a letter addressed to the American Ambassador in London on March 18, Mr. Hoover expressed the willingness of himself and his colleagues to continue their activities in Belgian relief in spite of the personal sacrifices it involved. In this letter Hoover pointed out that in agreeing to continue the relief work he wished to call attention to two important factors. First, that under the circumstances it was absolutely impossible to prevent leakages of foodstuffs, and the Commission was unwilling to be held responsible for such minor leakages which were bound to occur from time to time, in view of the conditions under which the work was done. The Commission would use its best efforts to stop any leakage of food and was convinced that as a result of the guarantees which the Commission and its patrons had obtained since January 1, 1915, about 94 per cent. of the total native food-supply of Belgium had been saved for the civil population. In view of this real achievement the Commission felt they

ought to be spared criticism as to minor leakages. Secondly, it was absolutely hopeless to carry on the work without the daily co-operation of the various departments and agencies of the British Government. Mr. Hoover said: 'In agreeing to continue, it is on the clear understanding that the closest co-operation with the British Government shall also continue.'

**The confidence of the British Government in the C.R.B.**—In a letter of May 16, 1916, Sir Edward Grey informed the American Ambassador that the British Government would gladly give the assurance that it would continue to co-operate with the Commission. He also asked the Ambassador 'to make clear to Mr. Hoover and those associated with him in this great humanitarian work that it is the desire and intention of His Majesty's Government that the various public departments connected with the work should co-operate with the Commission in the closest possible way. I am happy to be able to say that the Commission continues to enjoy the complete confidence of His Majesty's Government, and I should like to add my own personal tribute to the admirable organisation which they have evolved and to the tireless energy of all its members who are so devotedly carrying out their difficult task.'

#### DIFFICULTIES IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF RELIEF, JUNE TO AUGUST, 1916

Differences of opinion between the C.R.B. and C.N. concerning the Benevolent Fund. It may have seemed, after the episode of February, that the question of the relation between the Comité National and the Commission for Relief in Belgium should have been definitely resolved, but in a very short time further difficulties of a somewhat different sort began to arise. These had their origins chiefly in the manner of getting up the accounts of the Benevolent Fund. Mr. Hoover, in a memorandum of May 27, proposed that, in drawing up the accounts of the Commission, the value of the gift service and concessions obtained by the Commission for Relief in Belgium should be set apart from the profits arising from the sale of food, which practically amounted to a tax on the Belgian population. Hoover thought that it would be possible to make a digest of the profits and determine what portion formed an indirect levy on the Belgian people and what portion was due to the volunteer service and innumerable concessions obtained by the Commission. Mr. Hoover thought it advisable to do this, as the volunteer service and the concessions were a gift to the Belgian people, just as much as the specified donations of money or food. He therefore proposed that the difference between the average cost of goods delivered by the Commission to the Comité National and the average London prices should be taken as representing the value of the gift services and concessions obtained through the Commission. Any profits in excess of this sum should be considered as a tax on the Belgian population.

M. Francqui, however, objected to any such attempt to separate the profits into sums representing, on the one hand, the value of the Commission's volunteer service and, on the other, the tax on the Belgian people. He said that the idea of putting in evidence the invaluable results of Mr. Hoover's efforts and his personal energy was quite comprehensible, but he thought Mr. Hoover was trying to do it in the wrong way. He thought that it was a mistake to attempt to make any distinction between the Comité National and the Commission in estimating the services rendered to the Belgian people.

**Francqui's conception of the relations of the C.R.B. and the C.N.**—Francqui wrote further that from his point of view the Commission for Relief in Belgium abroad was only a prolongation of the Comité National, while, on the other hand, the Comité

National was only the prolongation of the Commission for Relief in Belgium. He insisted that under the agreements between himself and Hoover all foreign business of the joint organisation was to be carried on by the Comité National under the direction of Franqui. He absolutely refused to admit that the Commission for Relief in Belgium possessed any independent existence or authority. He said that just as the Comité National had attached a certain number of Belgians to Hoover in London and Rotterdam, so in Belgium the Americans had been attached to the service of the Comité National in order to be of assistance to the Comité National. They had maintained their title of agents of the Commission for Relief in Belgium only in order to render their service to the Comité National more efficient and to enable them to claim greater prerogatives from their neutrality under the protection of the Commission for Relief in Belgium. 'It was also for this reason and with a view to maintaining unity of action among them that it was decided that they should have at their head here in Belgium a director who would put himself in accord with the president in Belgium of the joint institution of the Comité National and the Commission for Relief in Belgium, in regard to all special instructions to be given to his compatriots.' Franqui contended also that it had been agreed that the political and financial side of the joint undertaking should be managed solely by agreement between Hoover and Franqui; that so far as the financial side of the institution was concerned, it had been understood that all receipts collected by either of the organisations should belong to the joint institution without distinction of any kind. He therefore objected to attempting to draw a distinction in the accounts between the money collected in Belgium and that contributed by the outside world through the medium of the Commission.

This memorandum of Franqui brought into question again the relationship between the Commission and the Comité National. Franqui held to his own ideas, in spite of his experiences in London in February and in spite of the agreement with Hoover in the previous July. As he clearly stated in the memorandum quoted above, he refused to recognise any independent action of the Commission in Belgium, insisting that he, as the head of the joint organisation in Belgium, was alone responsible for the Belgian end of the work, and that the director of the Commission in Brussels and the Commission's American representatives were merely his assistants, able to render great service because of their neutrality but possessing no power of independent action. He refused absolutely to yield the position set forth by Sir Edward Grey in the letters quoted in the previous section, and continued to insist that the Commission for Relief in Belgium should turn over all supervision of affairs in Belgium to the Comité National.

**The attitude of the Commission.**—This attitude of Franqui's, even though it was expressed on this very minor question, yet profoundly disturbed Mr. Hoover and his associates. It was through no desire of their own for power or prestige or any vain wish for glory that they had insisted upon the recognition of the independent power of the Commission and upon its responsibility for the supervision of the whole of the relief operations in Belgium. As Mr. Hoover had repeated many times, the Commission would have been only too glad to have withdrawn from the whole work and left the Belgians to do it in their own way, but the Commission's active participation in the relief work had been made the condition of its continuance by the allied governments, and, in view of this condition, the Commission could do no less than continue to assist the Belgians in any way possible. This continuance involved unpleasantness in Belgium in getting the leaders of the Comité National to realise that since the Commission was held responsible for everything that

happened in Belgium, it must have such real authority over the relief work and such supervision over the food distribution as would permit it to discharge its obligations to the Allied Powers and to the Belgians themselves.

**Francqui's opinion of the functions of the C.R.B.**—What M. Francqui really desired was that the Commission should continue to send food into Belgium and should maintain American representatives there to give weight and prestige to the position of the Comité National; but that these representatives should restrict themselves to whatever functions the Comité National chose to assign them. Francqui contended that the whole work of food distribution should be done by the Belgian committees without interference from the Commission for Relief in Belgium, and that the Commission for Relief in Belgium should accept the assurances of the Comité National that all was well in Belgium and should transmit these assurances to the allied governments. But under the conditions prevailing in Belgium this was quite impossible. The Commission, representing as it did the humanitarian feeling of the whole outside world, and representing also in a peculiar sense the American people, could not assume responsibility of any kind unless it knew from its own agents and through its own activities that the guarantees were being maintained in Belgium. It was impossible to do this without having an independent Commission organisation in Belgium possessed of considerable powers of control and supervision over the activities of the Belgian committees.

**Hoover's statement of the Commission's position.**—Mr. Hoover carefully explained this many times to Francqui. Thus, in replying to Francqui's memorandum of June 1916, quoted above, Hoover stated that the Commission came into existence as an independent organisation working side by side with the Comité National, but not a part of it. 'The only hope for the success of such an enterprise as this, is to build up institutions which embrace in their membership many thousand of devoted and influential people. This we have done by the creation of thousands of subordinate commissions in America, England and elsewhere. All these thousands of subordinate committees are aggregated around us and feel themselves part of an institution of high purpose and conduct. We thus gain an enormous influence which fortifies us from destruction by an ill-wind. As far as the Commission for Relief in Belgium or Comité National personnel, work or influence are concerned, they could not have been gained or held a day by simply Herbert Hoover or Emile Francqui, but could have been maintained only as institutions. . . . The whole ambition of the Americans is to carry on their part of the task efficiently and it matters not who shall go down to posterity as having taken the first steps in Belgian relief. My impression is that it would be necessary to make a directory to embrace the names of all the gentlemen who have performed the task of "saving Belgium," and I should be proud enough to get among the letter "H" inside the directory.'

As to the question of the regulation of the accounts so as to show the source of the profits realised in the relief work and turned over to the Benevolent Fund, Hoover said: 'I regret very much that you should think that there is any endeavour on our part to ask for any particular credit out of the Belgian relief, as I do not really care whether Belgian relief is ever heard of once we can get the job done.' He said that he felt very strongly that all the commercial firms, railways, banks and individuals who had given volunteer service to the Commission throughout the world should be given some tangible form of appreciation. Thus, one firm alone had abandoned commissions exceeding £100,000. Hoover thought that by setting apart the proportion of the profits due to this volunteer

service the Commission could best give recognition for these donations of service and of assistance to the cause of Belgian relief.

**Hoover's statement to the Foreign Office of June 30, 1916.**—Meanwhile the British Government, growing somewhat anxious about the way in which the work was actually going on in Belgium, asked Mr. Hoover how far the Commission for Relief in Belgium was maintaining an independent control in Belgium. In reply, Mr. Hoover wrote to Lord Eustace Percy, on June 30, 1916, explaining the reasons for the difficulties in Belgium. Thus, he said: 'The Belgian people, having built up under most terrible difficulties a strong institution in the shape of the Comité National, have a natural desire that it should steadily and systematically be held up to the front as a rallying-point of Belgian sentiment and solidarity, and that its brilliance should not be diminished by a parallel and a too prominent foreign institution. The most extreme form of this desire would be the total elimination of the Americans from Belgium, which I do not believe is at all intended. The question as to how far it is necessary for us to maintain an independent organisation under independent direction revolves, so far as you are concerned, largely around the question of guarantees. In the early stages of the organisation in Belgium the Americans performed certain functions in the relief work which do not at the present moment loom so large. But, as the Comité National has grown in influence and strength within the country and as life has settled down to more or less routine and settled relations with the Germans, this function is not so important as it was at one time. The whole desire of the Americans is simply to serve the Belgians, and above all to carry on this service on an amiable footing whereby no possible friction can result, and I am anxious to agree with M. Franconi in the desirability from the standpoint above expressed of entirely subordinating the Commission for Relief in Belgium organisation in Belgium to the Comité National and to do so with your full approval. Always bear in mind that this is not a business of personal *amour propre*, as we do not care an atom what position we occupy in the scheme as long as the Belgian people are fed.'

**The reply of the Foreign Office.**—In reply to this letter Lord Eustace Percy was directed by the Foreign Office to express the views of the British Government on the question of the organisation of the relief work inside Belgium. Lord Eustace, writing on July 9 to Mr. Hoover, recalled the fact that when the first permissions to send food into Belgium were given, the British Government laid it down as an absolute rule 'that no such imports could be countenanced or permitted unless the foodstuffs were imported as the property of and were distributed under the direction and control of neutrals.' To this end the services of the American Ambassador had been enlisted, and the British Government, on his recommendation, recognised the Commission for Relief in Belgium as being the organisation suitable to undertake the sole responsibility. The British Government had continued to give undivided support to the Commission. The devotion and efficient organisation of the Comité National and its branches was of course recognised, but as all Belgians were directly subject to control by the Germans, the British Government, in spite of the great confidence they had in the Belgians, considered it utterly impossible 'to rely upon them to bear the responsibilities for the conduct of the relief work in Belgium which you, not they, have assumed towards us.'

The British Government had relied upon the Belgian committees to give every help to the Commission for Relief in Belgium and it was obvious that the detailed labour of distribution would rest upon them, but the British Government had repeatedly stated

in letters to the diplomatic patrons of the relief work that the whole foundation of the work and the sole condition upon which imports could be continued was that the undivided responsibility for the importation and distribution of foodstuffs and money should rest solely upon the Commission for Relief in Belgium, 'the members of which, as neutrals, have freedom to come and go, and having no official position limiting their personal liability can in effect be held responsible for carrying out the various conditions upon which His Majesty's Government have been obliged to insist. . . . There would seem to be in Belgium a lack of real appreciation of the conditions which have been laid down by His Majesty's Government and of the constant vigilance which is necessary to carry them out. It may therefore be worth while to review these conditions with the suggestion that this communication should be forwarded not only to the Comité National, but to each of the provincial and other subsidiary committees for their information and guidance.'

**Conditions on which the Belgian Relief depended.**—The conditions mentioned by Lord Eustace were : First, that the Commission should transport all food to Belgium and retain the ownership of it until it was delivered to the final consumer ; second, the Commission must maintain in Belgium an entirely independent organisation, with its own directors and representatives, responsible directly to the chairman in London, and with a sufficient staff to ensure adequate representation throughout Belgium ; third, the Commission with the assistance of the Comité National must see to it that the German guarantees are strictly adhered to ; fourth, in view of the fact that the British Government and many British subjects had contributed large sums to the support of the work, they must insist that the Commission should satisfy itself independently that the food was distributed with justice and equality to the entire civil population, hence the Commission for Relief in Belgium had as its duty to supervise both departments of the ravitaillement and secours, because the German guarantees covered both and there could be no absolute separation between the two ; fifth, the memorandum of agreement of July 20, 1915, seemed to the British Government to provide the basis of amicable understanding between the two organisations. This provided for the independent organisation of the Commission in Belgium and for the settlement of all questions of broad policy by agreement between the heads of the two organisations. Since this agreement had been made two additions had been made to the joint organisation to guarantee the proper working of the entire organisation ; that is, a bureau of statistics and the Department of Inspection and Control, both under the joint direction of representatives of the Commission and the Comité National.

**The demands of the Foreign Office on the C.R.B.**—The British Government requested the Commission to inform it of any opposition to the agreement above mentioned and stated that they would insist that infractions of the guarantees should either be taken up directly with the local German authorities or reported at regular intervals to the diplomatic patrons at Brussels. 'While there are undoubted advantages in centralising these complaints of infractions through the chairman of the Comité National to the Ministers or through the chairmen of the provincial committees to the local German authorities, it is essential that the American director of the Commission, or his representatives, should be in agreement as regards all such representations, so that the Commission for Relief in Belgium can independently assure His Majesty's Government that such infractions have been duly taken up and remedies found. In conclusion, we wish to make it entirely



clear that this insistence on your independent duty of administration and control is no reflection upon the efficiency or good-will of the Belgian organisation, in which the allied governments have entire confidence. The whole object of His Majesty's Government, which can only be secured in the manner above outlined, is to maintain the distinctively neutral character of this work, which alone enables neutral opinion to be enlisted wholeheartedly and energetically in its support, and to relieve the Belgians themselves of responsibilities which, in their present circumstances, could only compromise such liberty of action as they still enjoy and endanger their safety.'

**The supervision of the Clothing Department.**-- One of the other causes of trouble between the Commission and the Comité National in Belgium had been the refusal of the Belgians in charge of the Département de Secours and the Section de Vêtements to provide the Commission with the information it required, or to permit its representatives to exercise the control over the charitable operations which the responsibilities of the Commission made necessary. In the first year and a half of the work the Brussels office had not concerned itself particularly with the work of the Benevolent Department, except to ask for occasional reports on the manner in which the relief moneys were being distributed. In the spring of 1916, however, the Commission felt it necessary to exercise a stronger control than before over the gratuitous distribution of food and clothing and the apportionment of relief subsidies, but they found that the representatives of the Comité National, in charge of their department of the work, were consistently blocking their attempts to make any investigations as to the manner in which the work was going on or to exert a certain control over the general direction of the work.

The question was particularly serious in the case of the clothing department. On March 14, 1916, the British Government had requested the Commission to discontinue all shipments of cloth and clothing into Belgium, because of the requisitions by the Germans of wool and cloth in Belgium. It was not until after two months of negotiations that the British finally agreed in June to permit the clothing bought by or donated to the Commission to be sent to Belgium. This permission was only given with the understanding that the Commission would extend to the distribution of clothing an independent system of control sufficiently complete to enable it to make sure that nothing was going to the Germans. The Commission in making the application for permission to continue the imports of clothing had foreseen this attitude of the British and had arranged for a more direct supervision of the clothing department by the Commission. In April, Mr. Milton M. Brown was appointed by the Commission as its representative for the clothing department, and he was requested to check over the work of the Section de Vêtements of the Comité National and to remain in close touch with all its operations. He soon encountered determined opposition from the Belgian head of the department, who refused to give him the information he requested or to permit him to take any direct part in the work of the Section de Vêtements. This attitude was supported by the comité exécutif of the Comité National itself. It was only after the most strenuous representations on the part of the Commission that Mr. Brown was enabled to go ahead systematically with his work.

There were various other similar causes of friction between the Commission's representatives and the Belgian committees. Some of the latter had persistently refused to adopt the regulations laid down by the Department of Inspection and Control. These committees in their opposition to the regulations of the department seemed to have the backing of the Comité National itself.

Hoover endeavours to clear up the situation.—In view of the conditions laid down by the Foreign Office in Lord Eustace Percy's letter of July 15 as to the organisation of the Commission inside Belgium, Mr. Hoover felt it necessary to take steps to ensure effective control by the Commission of the relief work inside Belgium. The reasons for this he pointed out in a letter of August 3 to Brand Whitlock. He said that he felt that for the present the letter of the Foreign Office should not be delivered to the Belgian committees and that it would be better to attempt to secure an amicable agreement than to try to enforce the regulations upon the Belgian committees. He pointed out also that 'the English Government has been greatly stirred up by constant reports which reached them from Belgian sources that the Commission for Relief in Belgium is having its functions submerged in such a way as to render it innocuous in the execution of its responsibilities, and they wish the Belgians to fully appreciate the danger of this course. On the other hand, I am certain that at least some of the Belgians have a growing sense that we are becoming a hard taskmaster, and if we can possibly accomplish our responsibilities without giving any appearance of undue interference I want it done. Therefore we will make another try. The difficulties with the Brabant committee are a good case in point. The administration of this province is a constant violation of every undertaking, and if our present pressure does not succeed in serving the fundamentals of justice in distribution and organisation and in protecting the guarantees, Dr. Kellogg may have to ask you to release the letter. The administration of the secours does not show us the good-will it should, but by patience we believe we may worry through with this to the end, somehow.'

The differences continue.—There followed two months of endeavour on the part of the Commission to induce the Comité National to change its view of the situation and to make the concessions to the Commission made necessary by the responsibilities imposed upon it by the public sentiment of the world and by the specific demands of the British Government. Little, if anything, was accomplished, however.

It became day by day more evident that the affair must come to a 'show down.' In spite of all Mr. Hoover's hesitation to have the appearance of coercing the Belgian committees, he came at last to realise that he would have to take strenuous measures to escape a situation which might at any moment bring upon the Commission and the whole relief work the disapproval of the allied governments and the stoppage of all food shipments to Belgium. The difficulties with the Comité National became more and more irritating. They reached their climax, perhaps, when by the order of M. Francqui the Commission's representative for the Department of Inspection and Control was practically ejected from the office of that department and informed that he was no longer to have any direct participation in its administration. This incident merely precipitated the crisis which had been developing for some months.

#### THE QUESTION OF SUPERVISION OF INSPECTION AND CONTROL

Difficulties in the Department of Inspection and Control.—While M. Francqui had always been opposed to any executive supervision by the representative of the Commission over the Department of Inspection and Control, he had taken no definite steps to restrict Mr. Green's activities until August 1916. Mr. Hoover had gone to Belgium at that time and had gone over the whole situation with Francqui. He had insisted firmly that the Commission's representative must be allowed to exercise independent control over

the activities of the department. Francqui had appeared to agree with Hoover, but, on the day following his departure, Mr. Green was given orders, through the representative of the Comité National in the Department of Inspection and Control, that no more letters were to be sent out from the department unless countersigned by Francqui. This system resulted in a natural delay in the correspondence. Some letters were held up for no reason ; some were torn up by M. Francqui. In one case especially, Mr. Green wrote a letter to the inspection service of Greater Brussels, asking them to investigate a case of violation by the Germans. Francqui not only tore up this letter, but ordered Green through Van Gend, the representative of the Comité National, that no more letters of this sort should be written in the future. A short time afterwards Green was notified that all letters of the department would be stamped with an inscription instructing the replies to the letters to be sent to the Comité National, department d'inspection, which meant practically that Green would see only such letters as Francqui considered advisable.

**The Suppression of Information.**—The Belgian Procureurs du Roi had been in the habit of transmitting directly to the department information concerning all the cases brought before the Belgian courts on charges of violation of food regulations. In August, Green found that Francqui had ordered these reports to be sent only through his office, had entirely suppressed many whole cases and had cut out facts of the highest importance in others. Not a single note remained in the form in which it had been written. It was found that M. Francqui had also intervened with various other official agencies in Belgium to cut down the information furnished to the Commission.

The special service of the inspection had in its employment a number of trained detectives and investigators who had formerly addressed their reports to the office of the Department of Inspection and Control in the Commission building. In August they were given orders to report exclusively to the Comité National. Many of their reports were suppressed and never transmitted to Mr. Green's office. Similarly, several other letters dealing more or less with routine matters were held up by Francqui's order and never transmitted to Mr. Green.

**Hoover's action.**—Mr. Hoover when acquainted with these facts was naturally very indignant, but he resolved to hold to his decision to take no radical steps until everything possible had been done to reach an amicable understanding with the Comité National. In view of the attitude of Francqui he saw that it would be necessary, however, for the relative functions of the Commission and the Comité National to be precisely stated and defined by the allied governments, in order that the questions which had been causing friction between the Commission and the Comité National could be automatically resolved.

After returning to London from a visit to Belgium in October, during which he had had several rather inconclusive meetings with Francqui, Hoover wrote to the American Ambassador requesting that the allied governments should definitely state the functions to be exercised respectively by the Commission and the Comité National.\*

Two days later Hoover prepared another letter to be sent to Lord Eustace Percy, stating the difficulties which had arisen between the Commission and the Comité National. In view of the request of the British Government that the Commission should promptly report any opposition to the execution of the Commission's responsibilities through the Department of Inspection and Control, Hoover wrote that he had been informed that

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\* Hoover to Page, October 16, 1916.

the files and documents of the inspection department had just been removed from the Commission's office and instructions given to the Belgian staff to no longer report to the American representative. He said therefore that he considered it necessary to lay the matter before the Foreign Office. On second thought, however, Hoover decided not to send this letter until he had had one more try at a peaceable settlement with Francqui.

**Ambassador Page's Advice.**—Ambassador Page had also advised him that the temper of the British Government was such that the receipt of such a letter would have disastrous consequences. They would either peremptorily demand the removal of the chairman of the Comité National or would suppress the food imports to Belgium until the Commission's organisation had been established on the footing which the British Government had from the beginning believed it to occupy. In view of the negotiations which were then under way for the increases in subsidies and in food-supplies, any such issue with the Comité National would have probably destroyed any hope of a successful solution of the various problems with which the Commission was confronted. Ambassador Page, in commenting on the situation to Whitlock, said that Francqui's standing with the British Government had never been of such a character as to permit him to take any such line of action as he had adopted. Page said, while he sympathised with Hoover's representations that Francqui was a valuable man in the position he occupied and that every support should be given him, that he (Page) would immediately withdraw this support if any more incidents were to occur similar to those which had just transpired in the Department of Inspection and Control.\*

**The Foreign Office Letter of October 20, 1916.**—The Foreign Office, in reply to the requests from Mr. Hoover and Ambassador Page for a precise definition of the respective duties and functions of the Commission and the Comité National, addressed a letter to Ambassador Page on October 20, confirming and expanding the previous expressions of the British Government's attitude toward the Belgian relief. In this letter Sir Edward Grey, now become Lord Grey, outlined the conditions which led to the approval by the Foreign Office of the shipments of food to Belgium, stating that His Majesty's Government had laid it down as an absolute rule that no imports would be permitted unless the food-stuffs were distributed by and under the direction and control of neutrals. Lord Grey said further that Americans had seemed to be best able to undertake the task satisfactorily, and the services of the American Ambassador had been called upon, with the result that Mr. Hoover was entrusted with the organisation of the Commission for Relief in Belgium, to undertake the necessary responsibility to the allied governments for the food to be sent to Belgium. Further, he clearly stated that His Majesty's Government 'see no reason to alter their original attitude, that the whole foundation and the whole condition upon which imports can continue is that the undivided responsibility for the importation of foodstuffs, the control over their distribution and the allocation of the moneys arising therefrom, shall be vested solely in the Commission for Relief in Belgium.' Lord Grey then explained the reasons, often previously referred to, which made it impossible for the British Government to accept the assurances either of the Belgians or of the diplomatic representatives of neutral countries, and that consequently only a neutral organisation such as the Commission for Relief in Belgium could make the necessary agreements with the belligerent governments and secure the fulfilment of such agreements. Agreements

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\* Page to Whitlock, October 18, 1916.

thus made by the Commission would be supported not only by the influence of the neutral governments, but also by public opinion in belligerent as well as neutral countries. If such agreements were made by Belgian committees under present political conditions, they would not be supported in the same way either by neutral governments or by public opinion. 'His Majesty's Government cannot therefore accept any substitution of the Comité National for the Commission for Relief in Belgium in such agreements.'

**The Responsibilities and Functions of the Commission.**—Lord Grey went on to specify that the actual ownership and control of all the imported foodstuffs should remain with the Commission, in order that it might maintain such supervision over distribution as would minimise the possibility of leakage. He pointed out that the influence of neutrals in Belgium was of the greatest value, because of their freedom of movement and action and independence of political and personal pressure. In consequence, Americans could maintain a degree of control that would be impossible for Belgians alone. With regard to the particular points in dispute between the Commission and the Comité National, Lord Grey expressed the following opinions :—

(1) The Commission must maintain in Belgium an entirely independent organisation composed of responsible and capable directors and managers, responsible directly to Mr. Hoover and sufficiently numerous to ensure the adequate representation of the Commission and the execution of its duties throughout Belgium. While, of course, the co-operation of the Comité National was indispensable, both it and its component committees 'must act as the agent of and on behalf of the Commission.' The co-operation between the Comité National and the Commission should be secured by the Commission having several neutral members on the executive committee of the Comité National and on the executives of the provincial and special committees. In all administrative decisions 'the views of the Commission's representatives must be given the weight which their great responsibilities demand.'

(2) The Commission must itself purchase and transport all foods to Belgium, according to the program fixed by the allied governments. All such food must remain the absolute property of the Commission until delivered to the ultimate consumer. The Commission should extend its control not only to all foodstuffs, but to all moneys for relief purposes, and the secours department of the Comité National should act only as the agent of the Commission, in its name and with its full knowledge and consent.

(3) The Commission, in order to discharge its responsibilities to the allied governments should maintain such a form of organisation for food distribution as to ensure absolute justice and equity and a minimum leakage. The Commission therefore must itself supervise the fulfilment of the guarantees, in order to be able to give the assurances to the allied governments that these guarantees were being observed.

(4) In the accomplishment of these objects, the British Government insisted that 'the bureau of inspection and control should independently satisfy itself that the whole relief organisation was functioning properly and that this bureau should be maintained, either solely under the control of the Commission for Relief in Belgium or, preferably, in co-operation with the Comité National. All accounts must be audited by independent accountants, and the bureau of statistics should be so organised as to supply to the protecting Ministers adequate data as to food collection, transport and distribution.'

**The Foreign Office attitude toward the Comité National.**—In presenting these stipulations, Lord Grey said that they contained nothing which the Belgians should not

be willing to accept, as they represented no reflection upon the efficiency or the good-will of the Belgian committees. The sole object of the British Government was to maintain intact the distinctively neutral character of the work, which could only be secured by the stipulations made. The British Government did not believe that the Belgian committees were in a position to assume separate responsibility toward any of the authorities. Any such action would only compromise and endanger their members.

Lord Grey concluded: 'I must again repeat that on no other conditions than those laid down above can His Majesty's Government permit food importations into Belgium.'

**Ambassador Page to Whitlock.**—In a long letter to Minister Whitlock on October 23, 1916, Ambassador Page emphasised the importance and significance of the attitude taken by the British Government, and pointed out that the relief work in general was already unpopular with large groups of public opinion in the allied countries and that the relief work had been continued so long only on the general belief in the allied countries that the whole of the relief work was controlled by independent neutrals under the patronage of American diplomatic officials. If it were suggested that the Americans were not the forefront and control of the relief work in Belgium, the whole thing would break down. Any action taken by the Belgians which tended to weaken the position of the Commission in Belgium would be, if it became known, the death-knell of the entire relief.

Mr. Page said that the British Government 'have been filled with anxiety for nearly a year as to the actual control exercised by the Commission in Belgium and by the reports of the assumption of domination by the Belgian committees. The matter would have reached a crisis long ago had it not been for the activities of Mr. Hoover, who has minimised the consequences of the actions of the Belgians in order to maintain good relations with all his associates. The action of the Belgian committees in replacing the name of the Commission for Relief in Belgium by that of the Comité National in distributing stations in Belgium, and the tendency of the Comité National to set itself up in agreements with the German authorities as the responsible agent of the relief work with only occasional references to the Commission for Relief in Belgium as an importing body, and its reports, which scarcely acknowledge the existence of the Commission for Relief in Belgium or give it studied omission, are all indicative of a set policy. What they may have in their minds I cannot understand. In any event, the protection of the relief abroad and support by our own Government at Washington, in holding the German Government to their undertakings, is wholly impossible on such a basis, entirely aside from the English view of the matter. The Comité National is not the pivot upon which the relief work revolves in Belgium. If the time ever arrives when we have to appeal to our Government to support the relief organisation in Belgium against German interference, we shall make a poor showing if the German Government should claim that their relations are acknowledged to be with the Comité National, a Belgian organisation entirely subject to German domination.'

Ambassador Page pointed out also that the attitude of the Belgians might have the gravest consequences because, if they made the situation so unpleasant for the Americans that the latter should decline from personal reasons to continue the administration, Ambassador Page would be compelled to advise the American Government that if they could not succeed no group of Americans could ever hope to do so, and it was certain that the allied governments would not tolerate the relief work to go on. Ambassador Page pointed out also that Mr. Hoover had 'entirely given up his personal interests and severed

all of his professional connections in order to give the time and energy necessary to the relief work ; that he had in consequence entirely stripped himself of his personal income and position, thus making a greater sacrifice than had been given by anyone else of any nationality. If, in addition to the great anxiety over outside matters, he was to be compelled to face even greater anxieties from lack of co-operation and deliberate interference in Belgium, it seemed too much to ask him, or any American, to go on.'

**Negotiations in Belgium.**—As soon as the Belgian officials in England learned of the gravity of the crisis and were informed of the unyielding attitude of the British Government and the determined support given by the American Ambassador to Mr. Hoover and the Commission, steps were taken to induce Francqui and his associates to recognise fully and frankly the position which conditions made it necessary for the Commission to occupy in Belgium. Confidential communications were sent to the heads of several of the provincial committees, pointing out that the continuation of the relief work would be impossible without friendly co-operation between the Commission and the Comité National and without the Commission enjoying independent control over all operations of food distribution.

Mr. Hoover went into Belgium immediately after these letters were written to attempt once again to reach a personal understanding with Francqui and to settle the crisis, but he found Francqui's attitude defiant and unyielding. Francqui seemed confident of the support of the Belgian Government in his position and refused to meet Mr. Hoover half-way in any agreement for co-operation between the Comité National and the Commission. Indeed, he declared that there could be no co-operation between the Commission and the Comité National: that in Belgium the Comité National was the relief organisation, just as the Commission was the relief organisation outside Belgium, and consequently all control in Belgium must be by the Comité National. Hoover remained in Brussels until November 12 and during this time had several meetings with Francqui and other members of the executive committee of the Comité National. It is useless and unnecessary at this point to run through all the details of the conferences that were held. So far as practical results are concerned, nothing was accomplished.

**Negotiations in London.**—On his return to London, Hoover immediately submitted to the American and Spanish Ambassadors, the Belgian Minister and the Foreign Office, copies of the correspondence which had taken place between himself and Francqui during his stay in Belgium and asked that the allied governments should decide on the points at issue.

During the ensuing month there followed a considerable interchange of communications between the allied governments, the Commission, the Belgian Government and the American Government on the questions which had been brought to the front by the attitude taken by Francqui in Belgium. The French and the British Governments persisted in the attitude previously expressed, that the relief work must be independently controlled by the neutral Commission, that no other basis could be accepted for the continuation of the relief work. The Belgian Government at first was rather disposed to support the attitude of Francqui, but as soon as the issues at stake had been clearly put before the Belgian Government, they agreed that the Commission should be given the control necessary in Belgium. Hoover had proposed to the Belgian Government that it should take over the whole of the Belgian relief work and should organise a purchase

and shipping agency to co-operate with the Comité National in Belgium. The French refused to accept any such arrangement so far as the provisionment of the North of France was concerned and Hoover therefore proposed that the Commission should continue to supply the North of France while leaving to the Belgian committee the responsibility for supplying the imports needed for Belgium.

**The attitude of the Belgian Government.**—Finally, in the middle of December, the Belgian Government became convinced that the relief work could only continue through a neutral agency and agreed that the Commission for Relief in Belgium as such a neutral agency should have the actual control of the distribution in Belgium. A proposed agreement was therefore tentatively drawn up for signature by the Commission and the Comité National and for approval by the allied governments.

Francqui obtained permission to leave Belgium in the middle of December and therefore proceeded to Paris, in order to confer with the Belgian Government. On his arrival he found that the Belgian Government had decided to accept the conditions imposed by the Foreign Office and that they were therefore not in accord with his ideas about the functions of the Comité National and the Commission in Belgium. The memorandum drawn up was submitted to Francqui for his approval, and after some delay Hoover was notified, on December 28, that Francqui would accept the agreement.

At this time the proposals which had been considered for nearly two years for floating an allied loan in America to cover the expenses of the relief work in Belgium and Northern France had assumed more tangible form than at any previous time. This fact was an added pressure on the Belgian Government and on Francqui to recognise that without effective neutral participation not only this loan, but any other form of support from America, would be made impossible.

**The Agreement of December 30, 1916.**—Hoover had a meeting with Francqui on December 28, at which Francqui agreed to accept the memorandum proposed by the British Government to the Belgian Government, defining the neutral and independent status of the Commission for Relief in Belgium and its relations to the Comité National. He said there were certain changes in form which he and the Belgian Government desired to introduce, but that otherwise he was prepared to accept the agreement. Hoover immediately accepted the whole of the alterations and told Francqui that the intent in drafting the whole contract was to restore the relations between the two organisations to their original basis. Francqui said that he had been ready at all times to make such an agreement, but Hoover pointed out that his attitude in Brussels in October and November had shown that he wished to exclude the Commission for Relief in Belgium from any real co-operation in the work in Belgium; that his whole attitude totally ignored the fundamental fact that the relief was founded and was permitted to continue by the Governments concerned only as an organisation under the control of independent neutrals.

Francqui stated that he had irrevocably resolved to resign the chairmanship of the Comité National and was going immediately to Belgium to secure the appointment of his successor and the acceptance of the contract to which he had agreed. Hoover protested vigorously to this, stating that since he was entirely in accord with the contract there could be no reason for his withdrawal, that Hoover and the whole Commission were convinced that he was indispensable to the Belgian people in his position at the head of the Comité National. Hoover said, furthermore, that in view of the disagreement that had occurred, it would be necessary for him to withdraw also from the work if Francqui



persisted in his intention to resign. Francqui therefore finally agreed to retain the chairmanship of the executive committee of the Comité National.

As Hoover stated in a letter to Whitlock, in discussing the whole situation: 'The admiration which I have for M. Francqui's abilities and his devotion to the Belgian people is in no sense diminished, and I hope we shall be able to demonstrate to him that, while we will not accept the position of servants, we are the most advantageous of partners. If I were to let myself down into pettiness for a moment, I might point out that this contract is identical in all its contents with the conditions of Lord Grey of October 20, 1916, which was in itself but a review of pre-existing relations.'

**The new basis of Co-operation in the Relief.**—The memorandum of agreement drawn up and signed at this time by Francqui and Hoover, acting respectively for the Comité National de Secours et d'Alimentation and the Commission for Relief in Belgium, was officially approved by the French, British and Belgian Governments. A copy of this agreement will be found in the volume of 'Reports and Documents,' published by the Commission in connection with this history. It is unnecessary to give a long summary of it here, as its chief points have already been sufficiently discussed. The organisation and the original relations between the Comité National and the Commission were described. It was clearly stated that the Commission by its own agency or through the patron Ministers had entered into a large number of undertakings with the Allied, Belgian and German Governments; that the Commission was thus entrusted with the protection of the relief work and with the protection of all funds and foodstuffs in connection with the relief. It was to be responsible to the Allied and Belgian Governments for the execution of the guarantees and for enforcing justice and equity in the distribution of food-supplies. The Commission was to furnish regular reports to the patron Ministers as to the fulfilment of the undertakings given by the Germans. It was to have the sole administration of all relief activities outside the occupied territories, and was, in conjunction with the Comité National, to be responsible for the protection and distribution of foods, for the adequate support of the destitute and for the general supervision of relief activities in the occupied territories. The Commission was to maintain an independent organisation in Belgium and establish through its director and representatives intimate co-operation with the Comité National and with the provincial committees in Belgium. It was provided that all questions of general policy were to be decided by agreement between the heads of the two bodies. The detailed method for the organisation of the co-operation between the Commission and the Comité National in matters of transport, ravitaillement, secours, inspection and control, commercial exchange, accounts and statistics were described in detail. It was provided that the Commission should have general supervision of the secours as well as of the alimentation departments, that the Commission should have a representative in the secours department to keep in touch with its activities and to make such recommendations as they saw fit. The vexed matter of inspection and control was settled by the provision that the Department of Inspection and Control should be managed jointly by representatives of the Commission and the Comité National. The department had as its purpose the investigation of and making reports on infractions of the guarantees, on illicit traffic in imported foodstuffs and on the general administrative operations of the various sub-committees.

**The old position of the Commission reinstated.**—This agreement therefore restored to the Commission officially the position it had originally held in the relief work

and for which Hoover had been contending since the beginning of 1916. Any other arrangement would have been quite impossible in view of the nature of the problems of the relief work and the political conditions under which it had to be carried on. Francqui himself soon came to recognise the justice of the Commission's position, and in a letter of January 1, 1917, to Hoover he wrote: 'None better than I know the tireless devotion which you have brought to bear on the accomplishment of the so difficult task which you have taken upon yourself. Like a veritable apostle you have for more than two years been making your voice of authority heard everywhere in the world in favour of my unhappy fellow-countrymen. You may be very sure that they are aware of your beneficent work and that they will cherish an eternal gratitude toward you. . . . We must go to the very end of the effort which we have undertaken in common and for that it is sufficient that we should both will that it should be so.'

And so came to an end one of the longest and most difficult and trying of the controversies in which the Commission was engaged. Its satisfactory solution is an eloquent tribute to the good judgment and to the practical wisdom of the two chief figures in the Belgian relief. It was, of course, quite impossible for anyone in Belgium to realise the conditions which the Commission had to face outside of Belgium, and therefore the attitude of Francqui is the easier explained. It was no more than natural, too, that the leaders of the Belgian committees should want to keep as much of the relief work as possible in their own hands, and should be jealous of the part played by any outsider, even if the intentions and purposes of the latter were as altruistic and straightforward as those of Hoover and his associates. It was regrettable that this feeling should have so seriously embarrassed the relief work, but it was perhaps unavoidable. The work of relief would probably have gone on harmoniously after the agreement of December 30, 1916, indefinitely, had not international events of the greatest importance intervened to bring an end to all American co-operation inside the occupied territory and to make it necessary to work out a new basis for the continuation of the relief work.

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## CHAPTER XVI

THE FINAL PERIOD OF AMERICAN ACTIVITY IN  
THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

(JANUARY TO APRIL, 1917)

## THE COMMISSION IN JANUARY 1917

**The Calm before the Storm.**—Never had the work of the Commission gone on more smoothly than in the opening month of the year 1917. Supplies were coming regularly into Rotterdam in as great a volume as at any previous period of the relief operations. The functioning of the system of distribution inside Belgium was more satisfactory than it had ever been. Differences with the Comité National had been cleared away by the agreement of December 30, 1916. The Commission had succeeded in stemming somewhat the deportations of men and had secured definite assurances that all functionaries of the ravitaillement deported by the Germans would be returned. The agreements negotiated with the Germans for the protection of native food-supplies were being ever more closely enforced. The Commission was on the point of securing still further protection, through the investigation and control of the 'centrales' set up in Belgium by the Germans to control the disposition of a number of the chief articles of production, such as potatoes, butter, fats, vegetables, etc.

The 'peace' declaration of the German Emperor and the subsequent note from President Wilson to the belligerent powers had made it seem possible that the war might be drawing to a close. At least, the German officers in Belgium and Northern France seemed inclined to be somewhat more cordial and conciliatory than a few months before.

**The Financial Situation of the Commission.**—One of the chief pre-occupations of the Commission at the time was the eternal question of where and how to find the increased monthly sums required by the increasing cost of the quantity of food authorised. In October Mr. Hoover had obtained permission to import the following quantities of food in addition to the amounts previously authorised :

Bacon and Lard	.. .. .	1,686 tons
Cheese	.. .. .	500 "
Coffee	.. .. .	1,100 "
Fish (Preserved)	.. .. .	850 "
Meat	.. .. .	500 "
Milk (Condensed)	.. .. .	500 "
Soap	.. .. .	1,000 "
Wheat	.. .. .	5,000 "

On October 27 Hoover had also been notified that the Cabinet had sanctioned an increase of £500,000 per month in the subsidies accorded the Commission through the Belgian Government. This increase was indispensable to any increase in supplies for

Belgium. In fact, Hoover had estimated that £900,000 per month would be required for the winter of 1916-17, in addition to the £1,000,000 already authorised. His estimate proved correct. In January the Commission found itself in serious financial difficulties because of the great increase in the cost of all foodstuffs, and because of the delay of the French Government in making effective their part of the increase in the subsidies.

**Hoover goes to America.**—In order to try to solve the Commission's perpetual problem of finding money to meet its obligations, Mr. Hoover went to New York in the first week of January to take up the question of raising in America a relief loan of a sufficient sum to relieve the Commission from further difficulties. The idea of securing a loan in America had been in Mr. Hoover's mind for two years. He had thought in 1915 of floating a loan through bankers in New York against security to be held in Belgium by a loan bank until the end of the war. Then the plan of an industrial commission had been taken up. If this had been put into operation, and certain Belgian industries revived, the sale of the products in the outside world would have provided a fund for exchange into Belgium which the Commission could have drawn on in London for its purchases. But this plan had not been accepted. The Commission had succeeded, however, in getting the allied governments to advance monthly, through the Belgian Government, subsidies which were usually sufficient to cover the Commission's program. The sharp rise in prices at the end of 1916, however, made these subsidies quite insufficient. By January 1917 it had become apparent that more money must be immediately found if the Commission was to carry out the program it had adopted. Mr. Hoover therefore went to America in the hope of being able to float a loan, on the security of England, France and Belgium, for a sufficient sum to cover the Commission's expenditures for a year or more.

**Poland's Negotiations in London.**—At the same time, Mr. Poland, who remained in charge of the Commission's work in Europe, took up with the allied governments the possibility of securing a further temporary increase in the subsidies allotted by England and France to the relief, sufficient to meet the increased expenditures of the Commission. On January 27 Mr. Poland wrote the Belgian Minister explaining the Commission's situation. He stated that 'within the next few days I expect to forward you a statement of the serious financial situation which is confronting the Commission and the necessity for the immediate increase of the funds available for expenditure by the Commission monthly by approximately £700,000, or, alternately, the immediate reduction in the Belgian program of imports by something over one-third.

'The above situation is the result, first, of the sum necessary to pay for the increased program which was approved effective in October not having been provided; and, second, because of the startling increase in the cost of all food products within the last few months.'

**Poland's Memorandum of January 25, 1917.**—Mr. Poland at the same time drew up the memorandum, referred to in this letter, on the financial condition of the Commission, for presentation to the allied governments. He submitted a draft to Lord Eustace Percy, who made certain suggestions as to its form and as to the method of presenting the Commission's plea for an increased subsidy. These suggestions Mr. Poland incorporated into the memorandum as finally presented. Lord Eustace suggested, among other things, that the Commission, in asking for an increase, should state that it 'hoped to secure the necessary increase in funds through a relief loan floated in the United States at an early date, but that the delays in arranging this loan appear to make a temporary increase in

subsidies necessary to tide over the time before the proceeds of the loan could become available.\*

In the letter which accompanied the memorandum, Mr. Poland wrote that the Commission had to face two alternatives: '(a) Either the monthly subventions must be increased by about £1,000,000; or (b) we must immediately reduce the value of our imports into Belgium approximately two-fifths. This decision must rest with the allied governments. We realise how momentous it will be for the people of Belgium.

'We should not be carrying out our responsibilities if we failed to give you our judgment on the present food situation of your allies.'

He went on to point out that the food-supplies available in Belgium permitted only the following *per capita* per diem ration:

	Grams. Total.	Grams. Proteins.	Grams. Fats.	Grams. Carbo- hydrates.	Utilised Calories.
Imported Food ... ..	387	27	28	178	1,095
Native Food ... ..	673	20	11	123	730
<b>TOTAL RATION ...</b>	<b>1,060</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>1,825</b>

At least 2,000 calories are required to maintain the physical standard of a population. A working man requires a minimum of 3,000 calories. Mr. Poland stated that the estimated ration of the British Isles provided an average of 4,000 calories. The enforced reduction in the imports to Belgium, should the increase in subsidies be not granted, would provide a ration of only 1,400 calories. The Commission, therefore, 'with all the earnestness which over two years of service may entitle us to express, begs, on behalf of the Belgian people, that this alternative be not chosen.

'On the contrary, in accord with our Chairman, I ask that the subsidies of the Commission be sufficiently increased to allow us to continue our present imports based on the minimum program which you have approved.' †

**The Financial Position of the Commission.**—The memorandum outlined in detail the financial situation of the Commission. Mr. Poland pointed out the fact that Hoover, in his memorandum of October 7, had estimated the cost of the proposed new program of imports for Belgium at £2,070,000, and had asked for an increase in the subvention for Belgian relief from £1,000,000 monthly to £1,900,000. The Cabinet had, however, only approved an increase to £1,500,000. In view of the loss on exchange in the part of the subvention received from the French Government, the increase therefore in reality amounted to only £476,000 in place of the £900,000 asked for. Consequently the purchase of the approved program involved a monthly deficit of £433,000. The increase in food prices had been very rapid and the Commission's deficit was correspondingly increasing. The January program, for example, cost £2,516,000 in place of the £2,070,000 estimated. An additional monthly deficit of £450,000 was thus created. If prices were to continue on the January level the deficit would be close to £1,000,000 monthly. Mr. Poland gave the following table to illustrate this point:

\* Letter of Lord Eustace Percy to Mr. Poland, January 29, 1917.

† Poland to Lord Eustace Percy, January 30, 1917.

(a)	Monthly income from British sources	..	..	£750,000
(b)	"    "    "    French	..	..	675,000
(c)	"    "    "    Commercial exchange, public subscriptions, etc.	..	..	100,000
				Total .. £1,525,000
	Cost of January program	..	..	2,515,000
	Monthly deficit	..	..	990,000

In view of the situation revealed by these figures, Mr. Poland pointed out the urgent necessity for the Allies to increase their monthly subsidies by £1,000,000. He referred to the distress that would be occasioned if the Commission should be compelled to reduce its imports, and asked the allied governments not to force the Commission into this alternative.

**The Breach of Relations.**—Before any answer was received from the allied governments to this memorandum, the whole political situation was utterly changed by a curt announcement from Germany of the beginning of the unrestricted submarine warfare, and by the breaking off of diplomatic relations with Germany by President Wilson. The breach of relations affected the Commission vitally, as it threatened the whole basis of its operations. It altered the whole financial position of the Commission. It became necessary, therefore, to take up new negotiations to arrange for the needed funds. The interruption in the Commission's transport service during the succeeding three months had the effect, however, of lessening the financial strain on the Commission until arrangements could be made for the continuance of relief operations. The allied governments did not act on the requests for increased subsidies contained in Mr. Poland's memorandum until the fate of the Commission had been decided. Mr. Poland repeated his requests in February and again in March, but only succeeded in getting sums barely sufficient to permit the Commission to meet its current obligations.

**The Commission's courier visits Zeebrugge.**—In the month of January, just before the breach of relations, an incident occurred which is of interest in showing the strength of the Commission's position and the peculiar nature of its relations to the belligerent governments. Since October 1914, by special permission of the British Government, the Commission had maintained courier service between London and Rotterdam. Once and often two and three times a week the Commission's mail was thus carried from London to Rotterdam and back by Mr. Roland Hill. Between November 1914 and January 1917 Mr. Hill had made nearly 500 such journeys across the North Sea to Holland and back. The Dutch mail line from Folkestone and later from Flushing was used for these trips. As the German light naval forces from Zeebrugge occasionally made a sortie and overhauled the steamers of this line, Mr. Hoover had made the necessary arrangements for the protection of Mr. Hill. As a British subject of military age, he would have otherwise probably remained a captive, if the boat on which he was travelling were to be overhauled. The German officials in Holland finally consented, on the basis of Mr. Hoover's representations, to grant a safe conduct pass to Mr. Hill.

On January 19 Mr. Hill embarked on the s.s. 'Prins Hendrik' at Flushing for the customary return trip to London with the Commission for Relief in Belgium mail. The steamer had hardly left Dutch territorial waters when she was held up by German seaplanes. Shortly after three destroyers came alongside and escorted the 'Prins Hendrik' to

Zeebrugge. Mr. Hill, in spite of his safe conduct, naturally felt none too comfortable as the ship was taken into the Belgian port. There were a number of other allied subjects on board, including men who had escaped from German prison camps.

Experiences at Zeebrugge.—At Zeebrugge the vessel was boarded by German naval officers and subjected to a thorough investigation. Everyone on board was searched and all male allied subjects of military age were taken off, except Mr. Hill. Hill himself was subjected to a very searching cross-examination, but stood the test without flinching. His documents and mail were examined with eager care, probably in the hope that he would be caught with uncensored mail from Belgium, but the Germans were unable to find anything out of order. When the examination was finished and the boat released, Mr. Hill's safe conducts and his mail were returned to him and he was allowed to proceed to London. He is probably the only man of British nationality who has been permitted to go out of Zeebrugge, when once taken in on a mail boat.

This incident shows something of the position enjoyed by the Commission and of the respect in which it was held by the German authorities. They had sufficient confidence in Mr. Hoover and his associates to permit an Englishman to carry the Commission's mails back and forth between England and Holland—and to grant him immunity from capture—on the simple assurance from Mr. Hoover that the Commission would respect its neutrality.

#### FIRST EFFECTS OF THE BREACH OF RELATIONS

The Severance of Diplomatic Relations with Germany.—On January 31, 1917, the German Government issued its fated declaration of the recommencement of the unrestricted submarine campaign. The waters about the British isles and adjacent to the other allied countries were declared closed to all traffic. Any ship venturing into this barred zone would be sunk without warning.

If the German Government had any doubts about the attitude the United States would take, these were dissipated on February 2. President Wilson announced the severance of diplomatic relations with Germany in terms which could only mean that if Germany continued in her policy the rupture would soon be followed by a declaration of war.

The breach of diplomatic relations between the United States and Germany practically swept away the foundation of the Commission's work. Technically, the Commission was a neutral body whose neutrality could not be affected by the development of a state of incipient belligerency between Germany and America. But, actually, practically all the members and representatives of the Commission were Americans and the Commission's influence had always rested largely on the neutrality of the United States. The breach of relations made Americans *persona non grata* in Belgium and Northern France and thus threatened the continuance of the relief work.

The Commission's preparations for an eventual breach.—The event did not find the Commission wholly unprepared. Hoover and his associates had long foreseen the possibility of an eventual breach between the United States and Germany and had carefully considered the question of the best means of continuing the relief work when the breach did come. Hence, Mr. Poland, writing on February 2 to the Rotterdam office, referred that office to a letter written by Mr. Hoover to the Director at Rotterdam on May 13, 1915, outlining the action to be taken in the event of an interruption of the

Commission's work. This letter had been written in the week following the sinking of the 'Lusitania.'

Mr. Hoover said he thought it possible that Wilson might break off relations and withdraw the American diplomatic representatives from German territory, including Belgium. 'In such an event I believe it would be necessary for us to withdraw the Americans on our staff also. If it should happen that we have to withdraw from Belgium, it seems to me there is only one course open to us, and that is to appeal to the Dutch Government to co-operate with us in substituting Dutchmen for our own staff in Belgium. In other words, that we should ask them to secure for us some Dutch gentleman of character and experience who will take Mr. Crosby's place, and who could secure something of a staff to take the place of the American element. . . . When all is said and done, it is my belief that the Germans are so anxious that these people should be fed, that they will not interfere with their foodstuffs, and that the necessities of the situation have now grown in their minds to a point where we can rely on this as a measure of protection more than we could initially. As a matter of practical administration, the co-operation of the Commission for Relief in Belgium and the Comité National in Belgium make enormously for efficiency, but if the whole of the Commission for Relief in Belgium people were withdrawn from Belgium, the feeding of the Belgians would still go on, although of course on a less satisfactory basis, and it is my feeling that so long as the Germans do not interfere with the foodstuffs, the Allies will continue to allow them to filter in.

'If it becomes necessary to reorganise the Commission by recruiting Dutchmen for Belgium, I would not propose to make any alterations either in London, New York or Rotterdam, but would merely substitute other delegates for the Americans now in Belgium. Nor do I believe that under these circumstances it would be necessary to maintain as many Dutchmen as we have Americans, for we should rely more largely on the National Committee in the distribution than has hitherto been done. We all recognise now that the organisation is well protected and works like a machine in Belgium. Our members, in the main, are maintained in Belgium to give assurance to the guarantees and to give moral support to the National Committee.' Hoover continued by advising the continuance of shipments into Belgium until further orders, even in case of a diplomatic breach, and emphasised the importance of continuing the relief.

**The Withdrawal of the American Delegates foreseen.**—Mr. Poland, faced with the actual breach of relations with which Hoover had dealt in this letter, written twenty months previously, found the situation so well outlined that he merely instructed the Rotterdam office that 'this letter of Hoover's should govern your actions in the conditions mentioned.' In another letter of the same date to the Rotterdam and Brussels offices, Mr. Poland stated that the conditions which might arise from the breach of relations had been already discussed and that the possibility of withdrawal of the Americans from the occupied territories had been foreseen. He continued: 'In this event the Foreign Office wish Mr. Gregory to carry the assurance that the British Foreign Office will endeavour in every possible way to avoid the interruption of the food-supply and suggests—as has been discussed between the Commission and the authorities in the past—that in this case, our men be withdrawn from Belgium and France and replaced by Danish, Dutch and Spanish neutrals, who, under the direction of the Spanish and Dutch Legations and the Comité National, will carry on this service. In this we concur.'

Poland's message to Hoover, February 3.—On February 3 Mr. Poland cabled



to Hoover proposing a line of action to be followed in the occupied territories, in the event of the withdrawal of the American Minister and the delegates of the Commission. The plan he proposed was as follows :

‘ (1) Place confidential Commission documents with Legation papers to bring out if possible.

‘ (2) Secure Danish and Spanish, and, after conferring with Minister Loudoun, Dutch delegates to represent Commission ; one for each province and district and a director at Brussels.

‘ (3) Arrange with German authorities before leaving that they continue all Commission guarantees as at present as a condition of Commission’s continuing imports into Rotterdam for Belgium and France.

‘ (4) Request Dutch Charge d’Affaires and Spanish Minister to continue to act as patrons and inform Comité National that if this can be arranged we will continue imports as heretofore, providing safe conducts are obtained.’

Poland added that that plan had been approved by Ambassador Page and that the Foreign Office approved using Spaniards, Dutch or Danish in the occupied territories. He said that he believed it practicable to continue shipments from the United Kingdom to Rotterdam without safe conducts, and that overseas shipments could go direct around the north of Scotland outside the barred zone, thus simplifying the passport situation.

**The problem of re-organising the relief work.**—It is interesting to note that the plan for the continuance of the Commission’s work inside Belgium after the withdrawal of the American delegates, thus suggested by Hoover and outlined by Poland, on the morrow of the breach of diplomatic relations with Germany, was the one ultimately adopted, two months later. But in the interim many plans were proposed and discussed. Many diplomatic discussions followed. All sorts of influences were brought to bear from various quarters to arrange another mode of continuing the relief. There was intrigue and secret diplomacy of the most approved *opera bouffe* variety to bring about a new regime that would give increased prestige to one or another of the remaining neutral countries. The Germans in Belgium played their part in this diplomatic comedy—so too did the Comité National. But ultimately all schemes proposed for the organisation of an entirely new committee or for the taking over of the Commission root and branch by one or several of the remaining neutral countries of Europe failed and the plans first proposed by the Commission were adopted.

The two months following the breach of relations were, therefore, for the Commission and for the people inside Belgium, a troubled and hectic period. Almost every day brought new developments or a new crisis. No one knew from one day to another whether the relief work might not suddenly come to an end.

But, in the meantime, the Commission went steadily on with its work, endeavouring in Belgium to maintain the rations of the people and to provide for all emergencies, including the possible withdrawal of the American delegates ; outside Belgium to provide for the continuance of the relief work, and to arrange for the resumption of shipments into Belgium at the earliest possible moment.

**The submarine campaign and the Commission’s shipping.**—The German declaration of a barred zone around the British Isles disrupted all the Commission’s shipping arrangements. In 1915 and again in 1916 the German authorities had after considerable negotiations relaxed their declaration of unrestricted warfare in the Channel to the extent

of permitting the ships with Commission for Relief in Belgium cargoes to go to Rotterdam via the Channel. The Commission's contracts with shipowners, and its insurance and chartering arrangements, were all based on the permission to use the direct southern route. Furthermore, the Commission's ships had always coaled on the outward voyage at a British port. In 1917 the Germans refused to make any concession to the Commission, and declared the submarines would respect the Commission for Relief in Belgium vessels only if these kept strictly outside the barred zone around the British Isles. This involved an additional journey of well over 1,000 miles for the Commission for Relief in Belgium ships. In order to keep out of the danger zone they had to pass around the North of Scotland and down the North Sea through the narrow channel of 'free' water between the British and German barred areas. The whole of the Commission's shipping arrangements had therefore to be modified. The Commission endeavoured to obtain the same concessions they had won in 1915 and in 1916. But this time they were doomed to failure. For nearly three months the Commission's transport service was suspended—a few ships got into Rotterdam in February, March, April and May, but the total food delivered was less than a month's supply. The inevitable result was the reduction of rations in the occupied territories to the starvation point. During the troublous period from February to May, therefore, the Commission was faced not only with the problem of readjusting its organisation, in view of the breach of relations between the United States and Germany, but also with the necessity of modifying all of its pre-existing arrangements for the transport of food to Rotterdam.

Lansing's message to Page.—On February 4 the American Ambassador in London received a cable from Secretary of State Lansing, transmitting a message from Hoover to the Commission. Lansing, in forwarding the message, said the department would be glad if the American Ambassador 'would express to the British Government the strong feeling of this country and of the Government that the relief of the Belgian and occupied French population must in any event continue, for this country will wish to show no less interest in this great work of humanity than has been shown during the last two years by the British and French Governments, should it become impossible for the Americans to remain in Belgium and in control. . . . We have telegraphed Whitlock asking him to remain at his post and asking him to secure from the German authorities for members of Relief the treatment of diplomatic and consular staff.'

Hoover's messages.—The following was the message from Hoover to Poland and Kellogg transmitted by Secretary Lansing: 'I think it extremely desirable for all members in Belgium to remain at their posts even after the departure of diplomatic and consular staff, if the Germans will guarantee their freedom to depart if situation became entirely untenable. Wish you to take Mr. Page's advice in all matters and to consult freely with Belgian and British Governments particularly on the following questions: First, of any change in sailing directions of ships afloat, such change, if any, to be issued by British Admiralty. Second, whether and by what routes ships at present at Rotterdam and Atlantic ports should sail. If new British minefield does not interfere, represent to British Government strongly desirability of taking route outside war zone at present time.'

'Ask Spanish Ambassador if he will communicate through Brussels and Berlin that as British minefields and necessity to bunker in the United Kingdom and conditions of charter and insurance render Falmouth Channel route the only practicable passage, the Germans should agree at once to respect relief ships and issue passes to this end, and that all departures are held up meantime.'

The portion of this message requesting the Commission's delegates to remain at their posts was immediately transmitted to Rotterdam and Brussels. On February 4 also a message from the Belgian Government was sent to Francqui requesting him to communicate with Mr. Hoover and to co-operate fully with him.\*

On February 5 another message was received from Hoover by the London office, in which Hoover again stated: 'Both the Government and myself are very anxious that every man should stay at his post in Belgium until the last moment. The department has asked Whitlock to remain at his post and to secure from the Germans undertakings protecting our men. In any event, please wire Rotterdam also to convey to Whitlock that he must secure this protection for our men, and it would be desirable that it should only be terminable upon request of Germans for our men to leave and it might be possible that they could remain even if Whitlock left. We will give ample warning of the last stage, and our men need have no fear as to solicitude of American people in their behalf, as any action directed against them would create more feeling in this country than the loss of a hundred ships.'

In still another message on February 6, Hoover again recommended that in case of the expulsion of the Americans from the occupied territories, the Dutch Government should be asked to take over officially the whole relief work. Hoover thought this advisable, because, as he cabled: 'I am convinced that a heterogeneous neutral committee would have no influence in protecting food and shipping.'

**Plans for the Continuance of the Relief Work.**—Two plans had thus been suggested for the continuance of the relief work: one proposed by Poland, that the Commission should continue, as before, to deliver food to Rotterdam, and that neutral Dutch, Spanish, and perhaps Danish delegates should take the place of the Commission's representatives in Belgium; the other proposed by Hoover, that the Dutch Government should be asked to take over the whole work. On February 5 a message was sent by Premier Briand of France to the French Ambassadors at London and Madrid, outlining the view of the French Government on the question of the continuance of the relief work. Briand quoted Hoover's statement that the Americans would remain in the occupied territories until they be replaced by other neutrals, and that the Commission would continue to purchase food and transport it to Rotterdam. Briand pointed out the necessity of replacing the Americans by neutrals, and stated: 'It will be necessary to find about twenty for Belgium, seven to ten for France. It will be necessary above all that the Spanish Minister at Brussels should continue, in the name of the King of Spain, to give his patronage to the Relief Commission. I think that it would be an advantage if the Queen of Holland would agree to support it.' Briand continued by recommending that Dutch delegates should be secured to replace the Americans.

**The situation in Belgium.**—Meanwhile, inside Belgium the greatest tenseness prevailed. The breach of relations had come during a week-end, on a Saturday afternoon. All the delegates from Northern France had come up, as usual, to the Saturday delegates' meeting, and were scattered about the country on Sunday paying visits to various friends. The rumour passed round on Sunday that President Wilson had severed relations with Germany, but only a few of the members in Brussels were actually informed of this action until Monday morning, when the news appeared in the German press. The delegates then

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\* See message from the Legation, The Hague, to the Embassy, London, February 4.

flocked into Brussels to await orders. Mr. Gregory had immediately gone to the German authorities to ascertain their attitude and to arrange for the continuance of the work without interruption. The authorities assured him of their anxiety lest the relief should stop and declared that they saw no reason why the Americans should not remain for the present at their posts. Von der Lancken assured Gregory that the Americans would be allowed the same privileges they had always enjoyed, and in the name of the Governor-General gave a formal assurance that the American members of the Commission would be permitted to leave the occupied territories if at any time the Commission decided to withdraw the American delegates. Mr. Gregory therefore instructed the delegates to return to their posts and to continue their work as before. At the same time he cabled Hoover, on behalf of the American members in the occupied territories, that they were ready and willing to stay at their posts as long as they were permitted to do so. There was, indeed, no doubt about the feeling of the delegates on this point. They were determined to see the work go on, and few thought of or considered their personal status. The delegates in Belgium immediately returned to their posts in the various provincial capitals. Even the delegates for the French districts returned as usual into the zone of the active armies, for what proved their last visit to their posts of duty.

#### A BERLIN CONFERENCE AND ITS RESULTS

The Conference at Berlin.—The final decision as to the status of the Commission and the attitude to be taken up by the German authorities could not be decided without consultation with the Imperial Government. On February 6, therefore, representatives of the General Government in Belgium and of the headquarters for the western front, left Brussels for Berlin to attend conferences that were to be held to discuss the situation and to decide the immediate fate of the Commission. Mr. Gregory sent out a message on the same day, announcing the departure of these emissaries for Berlin and stating that ‘the German authorities have given assurances to Minister Whitlock that all men would be guaranteed safe-conducts out of Belgium, provided they are obliged to leave.’

Varying reports of the Berlin Conference.—The Baron von der Lancken and Dr. Rieth of the Vermittlungsstelle returned to Brussels on February 10. Gregory at once had a conference with Dr. Rieth, who assured him that the conference had resulted favourably for the Commission; that, for the time being, the Americans could remain in Belgium with the same privileges as before; that even in case of war the German Government would like the Commission to continue its work and would permit a few Americans to remain in Brussels to exercise general supervision over the relief work.

At almost exactly the same minute the Baron von der Lancken was telling Minister Whitlock a very different story. His version of the results of the conferences in Berlin was infinitely less favourable. He said that the American Minister would no longer be accorded diplomatic privileges but would be treated in the future as a private citizen, if he chose to remain in Belgium; that the American delegates would not be allowed the same privileges as before; that the Commission would be permitted to keep five representatives in Brussels (the names of the five favoured by the Germans being given), but that the other delegates would probably be required to leave the country.

Messages to London.—Mr. Gregory, on hearing von der Lancken’s report, immediately sent the following message:

Whitlock is asked to remain as assurance of the German good faith to the Commission, but without diplomatic privileges. Whitlock will probably go out. Commission for Relief in Belgium may retain five principals in Brussels and von der Lancken suggests Whitlock, Ruddock (Secretary of Legation), Dietrich (Consul at Antwerp), Gregory and Gray. Could probably get permission to substitute and add two others, but all provincial delegates must be replaced by other neutrals and automobile privileges withdrawn. Above applies to present international status.'

The Rotterdam office, in forwarding this message to London, added: 'We must act promptly and you must advise at once if allied governments will continue imports on above basis. If not, think little practical good accomplished by our remaining and we had better close operations as soon as possible. Gregory states positively that in event of war he will not remain here. It might under all the circumstances be desirable to substitute an entirely new personnel of some other neutral country.'

**Francqui's message.**—At the same time the Rotterdam office sent on to London a message prepared by M. Francqui and the Marquis de Villalobar for transmission to Hoover. This message stated the decision of the Germans quoted in the message sent by Gregory and continued: 'The German Government will be very happy to see the Commission continue its activity in Holland, England and America, on condition, however, that the Commission for Relief in Belgium boats will strictly observe the indications laid down by the new blockade and will take the northern route for Rotterdam. Belgian coal will be furnished Rotterdam through the medium of the Commission for Relief in Belgium, who will assure the transport of this coal by its canal boats returning to Rotterdam. The German Government suggests the taking of other neutrals, who would enjoy the same privileges as the Americans have been accorded until now, in order to replace the latter. We could engage temporarily a few neutrals, Spanish, Dutch and Danish here.'

**Gray's message.**—To supplement these messages, Prentiss Gray, the assistant director of the Brussels office, who had gone out to Rotterdam to confer with the office there, sent an additional cable reporting the different versions of the decisions reached in Berlin, given by von der Lancken and Dr. Rieth. He stated also that one of the officers from Northern France had said that the existing composition of the Commission and the privileges accorded the Americans would remain unchanged. Gray continued: 'We cannot clearly estimate the influence exerted by Villalobar in the reduction of the staff to five Americans. We are however of the opinion that a counter-proposal offering conditions similar to those which obtain in Northern France, regarding personnel, might be acceptable. Recommend, however, that door be left open to future negotiations. Germans will not lay down working conditions possible in the event of hostilities. The members of the Commission are nearly unanimous in the wish to stay with the work under any conditions and they are willing to accept any terms whereby the continuation of the work will be ensured.'

**Effect of these messages.**—These messages confirmed the belief in London that the Commission could not continue its work inside Belgium, and made it seem doubtful whether the Belgian relief work could be continued by any other organisation. Before these dispatches were received from Brussels, the London office had had another long cable from Hoover, dated February 6, in which he had expressed the opinion that 'this situation is developing toward the ultimate necessity of withdrawing our men from Belgium. In this case it seems to be absolutely essential that relief should be taken over officially,

both internally and externally, by the Dutch Government ; that the personnel in Belgium should be composed of Government and army officers, not volunteers, and that the Government should take over buying and transport operations as part of their own existing import operations.'

Hoover continued that he thought it would be impossible to continue the work, with other neutrals in charge in the occupied territories. The Commission then could exert no real influence and it would be impossible for it to assume responsibility for what went on in Belgium. 'It is imperative that we should liquidate the Commission for Relief in Belgium as an institution and secure its honourable discharge.' Hoover believed the Dutch Government could exert sufficient influence on the Germans to carry on the relief work successfully and that it could easily take over the work of the relief. He therefore urged that efforts should be made to persuade the Dutch Government to assume responsibility for relief work in the occupied territories. All arrangements made by the Commission had been previously under the patronage of the Dutch Government, and the Germans would in all probability reaffirm all their guarantees, previously given to the Commission, to the Dutch Government.

Hoover concluded : 'In case of failure of Dutch, it would be better to hand over the whole operations to Danish Government, and in the event of the failure of this it would be better that the internal operations be taken over by the Swiss Government and for the Belgian Government or Comité National to take over external operations. I wish you to present these views to Mr. Page and, if you all agree to them, to strongly impress them upon the British, French and Belgian Governments.'

Conferences in London.—Mr. Poland and Dr. Kellogg immediately acted on Hoover's suggestion and discussed the question of withdrawing the Commission, and of substituting some other neutral agency in the relief work, with Ambassador Page and representatives of the English, French and Belgian Governments. In writing M. Cambon of the French Embassy on February 7, Mr. Poland enclosed a copy of Hoover's message and stated that the members of the Commission were in thorough accord with Hoover's proposal, which agreed in the main with the proposal contained in a memorandum of the French Government on the continuation of the relief work.

Poland soon found, however, that the Belgian Government had also already taken steps to ensure the continuance of the relief work in the event of the withdrawal of the Americans. It had made a formal proposal to the Dutch and Spanish Governments that a joint Spanish-Dutch organisation be formed to take over the work of the Commission. The Spanish Ambassador in London, His Excellency Señor Don Merry del Val, also informed Ambassador Page that the withdrawal of the Americans would not alter the status of the Commission ; that the Spanish had been jointly responsible with the Americans in the past, and that they would represent the Commission in any new organisation that would be set up. In cabling this information to Hoover on February 8, Poland stated that both the Belgian and British Governments seemed to favour the inclusion of the Spanish in any new organisation, as Spain was the most important country still maintaining neutrality. Consequently, the London office advised Hoover that it would not be possible to arrange an exclusively Dutch organisation.

Effect of the messages from Brussels.—The question of continuing the work of the Commission remained still far from decided when the messages from Brussels giving the German attitude were received in London. The London office immediately conferred

again with Ambassador Page and they agreed that in view of the German attitude the American delegates should be immediately withdrawn.

**Ambassador Page's message to the State Department.**—Page accordingly cabled this advice to the State Department, while Kellogg and Poland cabled Hoover a full statement of the situation with the same recommendations. Dr. Page said: 'Hoover and his associates can, in my judgment, pursue only one course, namely, inform the German Government immediately that every American retires. Get all American members out of Belgium and France in whatever way their exit can best be managed by Gregory, with whom Poland is conferring by telegraph, and close the Commission's business immediately in Belgium and France and liquidate as soon as possible. We shall have to leave to the decision of the British, French and German Governments the work of the future. Americans can now retire with clean record and make dignified exit without parley, leaving the onus on the German Government. . . .

'I regard it as of the very highest importance that Hoover announce retirement under German order emphatically and immediately. Further discussion may lose the present tactical advantage. I await department's instructions to me to retire as patron of Commission, which I hope will be given.'

**Instructions to Gregory.**—On the same day Ambassador Page sent this message to the State Department (February 12) the London office sent the following instructions to Gregory and Whitlock: 'In accord with Mr. Hoover and Dr. Page. In view of the communication from German Government to you, through Lancken, that Americans can no longer exercise their functions in Belgium and Northern France, please notify the German authorities and Comité National that, as under these conditions the American members of the Commission can no longer carry out their responsibilities and undertakings with the other interested Governments and toward the people of France and Belgium, the American members officially withdraw from participation in the work of the Commission for Relief in Belgium and the relief work in France. Further inform German authorities that we have assured the allied governments on the basis of previous German communications to the Commission that our withdrawal from participation in the work of the Commission does not in any way affect the continued existence of the Commission. Consequently we have also informed the allied governments that no guarantees given to the Commission or its patron Ministers by either of the belligerents are invalidated by our withdrawal. We assume German authorities will be glad to confirm this understanding to the patron Ministers. The British Government on their part have expressed their approval of continued importations through the Commission without interruption. We advise you to arrange for all men to leave Belgium and Northern France at once, except you, Gray, Neville and perhaps one or two others of Commission staff, needed to close up affairs and ensure no interruption of relief pending reorganisation. Important papers and all accounting figures not required to carry on current business should immediately be sent out or, if this is not possible, stored with the Legation papers under protection of the Spanish Minister. Close all books and accounts as between the Commission Rotterdam, the Commission Brussels, the Comité National and the Comité Français as at February 15, midnight, including Rotterdam shipments to that date.'

**The message to Hoover.**—The London office repeated this message to Hoover in the United States, adding: 'Above action was considered imperative by Dr. Page in consultation with members here. We believe you have indicated absolute accord. . . .

We are making no public announcement here regarding above, thinking you would prefer to do so yourself from America.'

**The Commission announces its Withdrawal from Belgium.**—The London office, at the same time, informed the Foreign Office, the French Embassy, the Belgian Minister and the Spanish Ambassador of the decision reached by the Commission.

The assurance was given that the Commission in withdrawing would take no action that 'will in any way jeopardise the food-supply of either the French or the Belgian people. Our operations will continue uninterruptedly as at present, until such time as we may have mutually arrived at a new basis of work made necessary by the withdrawal of our nationals from Belgium and France.'\*

In another cable of the same date, February 12, to the Rotterdam office the point was emphasised that 'there must be no interruption of the food-supply. Future arrangements between New York, London and Rotterdam for carrying on work not yet determined.'

After the despatch of these letters and cables the men in the London office thought the work of the American members of the Commission would immediately come to an end. The uncertainty of the two weeks just passed seemed at last cleared up and a definite course of action decided upon.

**The Associated Press Announcement.**—Immediately on receiving the message from London of February 12, Hoover made the announcement through the Associated Press that the Commission was withdrawing from the occupied territories. He stated that this decision had been forced by the German order that Americans would not be allowed to retain the privileges they had previously enjoyed. He emphasised the fact that the withdrawal of the Commission did not mean the cessation of the relief work. The Commission, he said, would continue to collect funds and would co-operate with any other neutral relief organisation that might be formed to carry on the work inside. He concluded: 'If the Germans do not interfere with the distribution, meanwhile allowing an opportunity for another neutral group to take control of the relief measures, there is no reason why the relief work should not proceed indefinitely.'

This press announcement was published widely throughout England and America in the evening papers of February 13 and in the morning papers of the 14th. The final chapter in the story of the American effort in the relief of Belgium and Northern France seemed to be drawing to a close.

**The British Government's recognition of the work of the C.R.B.**—Both the British and French Governments made official statements in recognition of the work done by the Commission since 1914. Lord Robert Cecil, in an interview prepared for the press on February 14 but never published because of later events which gave the Commission a new lease of life, said the withdrawal of the Americans from the Commission would be 'very sincerely regretted by the allied governments.' Lord Robert pointed out that though the Commission was officially a neutral body and would still go on in the hands of other neutrals, yet 'the organisation of the Relief Commission, both here and at Rotterdam, as well as in Belgium and Northern France, was created by and depended upon Mr. Hoover and his colleagues, who for more than two years have sacrificed every personal interest to this great humanitarian enterprise. It is they who have dealt daily and hourly with the Foreign Office here, with the German authorities at Brussels and with the German headquarters

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\* Letter to the Belgian Minister, February 13, 1917.



in Northern France. They have been the constant intermediaries in a series of most arduous international negotiations, and it is they who have built up the elaborate system of guarantees which has made the continuation of the work possible for twenty-eight months and which stands to-day as a bulwark between the Belgian people and their invaders.'

Lord Robert Cecil continued that the proposals to introduce food into Belgium had been directly contrary to military prudence ; that he was doubtful if the permits would have been given had the people realised how long the work was to last and to what extent it was to grow. ' Yet in spite of this, the work has gone on uninterruptedly for twenty-eight months and has grown from small beginnings into an undertaking which may be literally called gigantic.

' Now, the only thing which has made this possible has been the absolute confidence which Mr. Hoover and his colleagues have inspired in all the allied governments. They have been in the most difficult position and have borne the heaviest responsibilities that could possibly fall to the lot of any neutral, but their absolute frankness in discussion and their energy in carrying out their undertakings have led us to rely absolutely on their word and upon their ability. How high a tribute this is, no one can perhaps understand who has not had actual experience of war conditions, but the American people may be confident that these American citizens leave behind them in Europe a reputation which, if I may say so, America may count upon as a national possession in future years.

' I do not speak of the financial help which the American people have given to the Relief, because this is a sort of farewell speech, and I am sure that while we must say farewell to the American directors of the work, we need not do so to American interest in the work. On the contrary, I am sure that American interest will in the future be even keener than in the past, and that the American people will take a pride in competing with the allied nations in giving financial support to a great enterprise with which the name of America must for ever remain associated.'

**The Gratitude of France.**—On February 14 the London office received a letter from M. Paul Cambon, French Ambassador in London, transmitting a message of appreciation from Premier Briand. M. Cambon wrote that ' the necessity imposed upon the representatives of the Commission for Relief in Belgium to leave the invaded districts has been deeply felt by the French Government. The Government has charged me, on this occasion, to transmit to you the assurance of its profound gratitude, gratitude to those of your representatives who have been in the North of France, as much as for the splendid work which you and they have performed.'

In his message to Cambon, M. Briand wrote : ' At this moment, when the German Government is forcing the American representatives of the Relief Commission to leave the invaded districts and to abandon the work to which they have dedicated themselves with so much devotion, I desire you to express to the Central Committee of the Commission in London the recognition and gratitude of the Government of the Republic for the humanitarian work which the American representatives of the Commission, with the devoted collaboration of the Spanish representatives, have carried out, in saving unfortunate French people from famine. I do not overlook the degree of disinterestedness with which the Commission has successfully administered a work of complicated and difficult character.'

Briand added that he hoped the relief work could be continued by the aid of the Spanish Government, to which the French Government had appealed, and that he was sure ' that the services of the Americans of the Commission would be continued in the same

devoted spirit, in the work of purchasing and transporting the relief supplies to the invaded districts, with the co-operation of the other neutral representatives who would replace the Americans in these districts. . . .

‘Among all the acts of charity which now stand to the credit of the Americans and which earn our gratitude, the work of the Relief Commission is to us one of the most valued, since it is working to aid those French people who have, added to all their other misfortunes, that of temporary separation from their Mother Country, and who have to suffer bondage to the enemy.’

**The Spanish Ambassador offers to take over the Relief.**—The Belgian and French Governments, as soon as the withdrawal of the Americans from Belgium had been announced, had immediately appealed to the Spanish Government to use its influence to ensure the continuance of the relief work under Spanish patronage. The Ambassador of Spain in London, therefore, wrote to Mr. Poland on February 13, in reply to a letter announcing the withdrawal of the Americans from the occupied territories, assuring the Commission of the willingness of the Spanish to take over the work. He said: ‘My sincere admiration for the work done by Mr. Hoover, by yourself and by your other American colleagues, in the Commission for Relief in Belgium moves me to regret most heartily the news of a possible withdrawal of the American element from participation in those operations of the relief which they have so ably and so unselfishly conducted and to hope that means may still be found to avoid it.

‘Should such a course turn out to be inevitable, I am happy, however, to be able to announce to you, as a director of the Commission, that I have taken measures for the continuation of the management by the Spanish element under my close guidance and supervision.

‘In consequence, I beg you to notify me of the moment at which the relief should be taken over.’

Before any actual steps were taken, however, to carry into effect the decision of the Commission to withdraw immediately, messages came almost simultaneously from Hoover in the United States and from Gregory in Brussels which entirely altered the situation. Events had been taking place in Belgium which made it seem possible that the Commission might continue its work as before—at least, until the moment when the United States should declare war on Germany.

#### A NEW LEASE OF LIFE FOR THE COMMISSION

**A new message from Gregory.**—On February 13 the London office received a message from Mr. Gregory, who stated: ‘I think the situation inside is improving. Any change in personnel will probably be made very gradually.’

This message was sent before Mr. Gregory received the message instructing him to withdraw. Neither he nor any of the other Americans inside had any thought or intention of retiring immediately, as it was generally felt that some arrangement could be reached with the Germans for the continuation of the work, at least until such time as the United States entered the war. When Gregory received the message instructing him to arrange for the immediate departure of practically all the delegates, he consulted with the other members of the Commission, and, in agreement with them, decided to

disregard the instructions and to go on with the work until the situation became more clear. His attitude was justified by later events. It would have thrown the whole of the relief activities into confusion if the Americans had retired in the middle of February before a definite plan had been agreed to for the continuation of the work.

**Effect of the announcement of the withdrawal of the C.R.B.**—When the published announcement issued by Hoover to the Associated Press came to the attention of the Germans it produced much consternation in Brussels in high quarters. The Germans most emphatically did not want the relief work to stop—and they desired to escape the responsibility of any stoppage. Baron von der Lancken had probably considerably exaggerated the decisions reached at Berlin in his statement to Whitlock, for it seems that, in reality, a decision had been reached to permit the Americans to continue to carry on the work much as before.

**Von der Lancken's letter of February 10.**—Indeed, when von der Lancken's official letter to the Spanish Ambassador was received, it was found to contain none of the statements made to Whitlock by von der Lancken concerning the necessity for the withdrawal of the Americans. In fact, von der Lancken began his letter by saying: 'The breach of diplomatic relations between the Imperial Government and the Government of the United States of America might create the impression that a new situation had arisen, for the work of ravitaillement of the civil population of the occupied territories of Belgium and Northern France.

'To avoid that misunderstandings should arise on this occasion, I immediately want to advise your Excellency that such opinion would seem erroneous to me, as this work enjoys the highest protection of the Government which your Excellency represents as well as that of the Netherlands, at the same time, and to the same extent, as that of the United States. If, thus, the Government of His Majesty the King of Spain considers that it should continue to give its high protection to the work of ravitaillement, I have the honour to inform your Excellency that the Imperial Government and the Governor-General in Belgium will, in future, as they have in the past, and in conformity with the agreements, give their aid and protection to this work so beneficent for the suffering populations of the occupied territories of Belgium and Northern France.'

The only reference to the possibility of the departure of the American delegates was the following: 'The possibility having to be considered that certain American members of the Commission for Relief in Belgium might think it necessary to return to their country, I think that your Excellency will find it useful to replace these by other persons who may seem to your Excellency to be fit for this mission, the Commission since its inception having been composed of neutral members of different nationalities.'

The letter thus only stated that in view of the circumstances some of the Americans might desire to return home, and suggested that in such an event it would be advisable to secure other neutrals to replace them. This probably represented the Berlin decision.

**The Germans deny that they ordered the Americans to leave.**—The statements made to Whitlock by Lancken on February 10, communicated to London by Gregory on February 11 and publicly announced by Hoover on February 13, were probably inspired only by a desire on the part of von der Lancken to get rid of the Americans as soon as possible.

After the Associated Press announcement was made, the Germans immediately repudiated the conditions of von der Lancken's statement. An announcement was released to the German press to the effect that in Belgium the American delegates would be allowed

to continue their work under the same conditions that had previously prevailed, except that in Northern France and the etappen regions new conditions might be imposed, but that the relief work could continue.

**New Assurances from the Germans.**—The German authorities in Brussels gave the same assurances to Mr. Gregory on February 14 and 15. In fact, no steps had yet been taken by the Germans to restrict the privileges of the delegates in Belgium in any particular, and no such steps were taken. As long as the delegates remained they continued to have their permits to travel in automobiles and were allowed to move about Belgium with the same freedom as they had enjoyed before the breach of relations.

**The situation in Northern France.**—A different situation, however, existed with regard to the delegates for Northern France. The delegates had returned from their posts as usual for the meeting of Saturday, February 9. They had been for the most part well received in their districts by the German officers and had had no instructions that they would not be allowed to return to France. At the Saturday meeting, Mr. Gregory advised them to return to their posts as usual for the following week. On Monday, however, word came from German headquarters at Charleville to Mr. Gregory that, pending a definite decision as to the status of Americans in the occupied territories, the delegates should not return to France. All the delegates except Philip Potter therefore remained in Brussels to await developments. Potter had left Brussels for Valenciennes in tow of his officer before the message came from headquarters. He remained the week at his post, and therefore had the distinction of being in France a week longer than any of the other delegates. He returned to Brussels on February 14, and after that time none of the delegates got back to France.

**Gregory refuses to permit delegates to return to France.**—The German authorities stated that the delegates could return to France, but would not be allowed to go each week to Brussels. Instead they would be permitted to go only once every month or six weeks. In case of the outbreak of war, they would probably be required to undergo a 'quarantine' of a month in Germany. Under these conditions Mr. Gregory refused to allow the delegates to go back to the French districts. He attempted to get headquarters to restore the old basis of work, but this the Germans would not do. So the delegates for Northern France were, perforce, obliged to sit in Brussels waiting day after day for the orders that never came to return to their posts. These weeks of tension and of idle waiting were a very great strain on the nerves of the men involved. It is never easy for an active man to sit idly by while great events are happening. It was all the more difficult for these men who had been in the thick of the Commission's work for many months.

**Gregory's message to London, February 15.**—Mr. Gregory, on February 15, telegraphed to London, via Rotterdam, his decision to remain. He said: 'We have had to-day a meeting at which assisted von der Lancken, Villalobar, Whitlock, Bruhn, Reith, Francqui and Gregory, concerning telegram of the 12th instant. It has been agreed that our delegates may remain as heretofore and with the same privileges. However, it is possible that later it may be necessary to place delegates of other nationalities on military fronts. In consideration of this, the protecting Ministers and Gregory suggest that we keep on our regular work as heretofore, and consequently we will not close accounts unless we receive other instructions from you.'

**Hoover's message of February 15.**—On the same day Hoover, cabling to London from New York, countermanded his instructions for the immediate dissolution of the

Commission. He said: 'I would like you to instruct Belgian staff to remain as long as possible at their posts. The Germans are obviously trying, by allowing Whitlock and few to remain, to throw responsibility on to us, and I have proposed to State Department that Whitlock should be instructed that he will only remain conditional upon his having full diplomatic privileges and upon the whole of the American staff being allowed to remain and exercise their functions as hitherto; and if Germans are not prepared for this, the entire Legation and relief staff will withdraw. The object of this is obviously that we shall throw responsibility on to Germans, and although I have no expectation they will accept it, it is desirable that we should proceed carefully step by step. I do not assume that allied governments will consent to the form of administration proposed by the Germans, as such an administration would be absolutely inadequate for the problem of the people and food-supplies. In the event of failure to secure retention of our entire staff, it is entirely desirable that they should, together with Whitlock, be withdrawn in order to clear the decks for a re-established neutral body of some other nationality.'

The London Office countermands the order to withdraw from Belgium.—On receiving the message from Hoover and Gregory, the London office at once sent notifications to the Rotterdam, Brussels and Paris offices not to close the accounts but to continue until further orders. The message to Brussels stated: 'American staff are requested to remain at their posts as long as possible, but notify German authorities this action is taken solely on the understanding that representatives' functions, activities, circulation, communication be continued in full. Advise whether full diplomatic privileges have been restored to Whitlock.'

On February 16 a public announcement was made in the British press and in America, through the Associated Press, that the Commission would continue its work. This announcement stated that 'the German authorities in Belgium and France, who some days ago notified the Commission for Relief in Belgium that Americans could no longer carry on their work in the occupied territories, have now reversed their decision and asked the Americans to remain. To this the Commission has consented, on the understanding that their functions and activities are to be continued unrestricted on the former basis. The control by the Americans will therefore continue as heretofore.'

Further Negotiations to ensure continuance of Relief.—The situation in Belgium remained as described above for more than a month. The Americans continued to go about the territory of the General Government as before. The disruption of the Commission's transport service and the impossibility of getting the usual shipments of supplies into Rotterdam until new shipping arrangements had been made produced a shortage of food in Belgium that caused very real concern to the members of the Commission both inside and outside the occupied territories. Every effort was made to arrive at a satisfactory arrangement with regard to shipping which would make it possible for the relief work to continue. In March, however, the rations had to be cut to a starvation basis because of the lack of supplies. Indeed, it was not until June that the shipments again became sufficient to supply the minimum needs of the population.

During the month that followed the preliminary arrangement agreed upon on February 15, the Commission inside Belgium was occupied also with the question of providing a means for carrying on the work in the event of the ever more certain ultimate withdrawal of the Americans. There were some, it is true, who believed America's entry into the war might be indefinitely postponed. It soon came to be fairly clear that short

of a declaration of war by the United States, nothing would compel the Americans to leave. The Germans had no intention of forcing them to withdraw. The Americans themselves had no intention of going except in the event of war.

**The Necessity for the ultimate Withdrawal of the Americans.**—When President Wilson, in the middle of March, summoned Congress into session, the thoughtful spirits in Belgium realised that the end of their work was very near. The arrangements for putting in a new neutral organisation to supervise the relief operations were therefore expedited as much as possible. But this was a vexed and difficult problem, a diplomatic issue of great delicacy and importance. In London, Paris and Brussels, conferences were going on almost continuously from the first days of February until the beginning of April, and an arrangement for the continuation of the relief work was finally agreed upon.

### NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE REPLACEMENT OF THE COMMISSION

**Arrangements for Continuation of the Relief.**—The decision of the Commission in February to continue work delayed, but could not prevent, the withdrawal of the Americans from the occupied territories. It was obvious that the American delegates could at best remain but a few months. The Commission and the allied governments therefore began at once to make arrangements for the continuation of the relief work, after the withdrawal of the American representatives.

Hoover, in cabling to the London office on February 13, had revoked his previous suggestions for the continuation of the relief work and had emphasized the importance of withdrawing the Commission completely from Belgium. He thought this to be the only way to secure a proper neutral control in Belgium that would protect the people and their food-supply; that if the Commission took any other attitude it would only be playing the German game in endeavouring to secure half-measures, with a neutral colour, but without the possibility of affording real guarantees to the allied governments or of protecting the people and their food. He therefore suggested that the following proposals be made to the allied governments:

**Hoover's Proposals.**—‘The Commission for Relief, having retired from Belgium, will also retire from the purchasing and shipping of supplies; these functions to be taken over either jointly by the allied governments, or by the Belgian Government itself, or any other body whom they may designate. The Commission for Relief in Belgium will continue in the United States as a recruiting agency for benevolence and propaganda in favour of the Belgian cause, provided a properly constituted control is installed in Belgium of such character as will command the confidence of the American people.’

Hoover added that the Commission would continue until a new agency was established, but wished to liquidate the whole of its relations to the allied governments and to obtain an honourable discharge of its stewardship, financially and materially. It would be highly advantageous for the allied governments themselves to purchase and ship supplies to Belgium.

Hoover again suggested that the Dutch Government should be asked to take over the work inside Belgium and to send into Belgium and Northern France the excess of Dutch native products. He said: ‘I consider that it is hopeless to protect the food-supplies in Belgium and to guarantee an efficiency of administration unless there is a forcible neutral

body installed in our place with equal powers, and if we are to secure continued propaganda and financial, governmental and charitable support in this country, such a neutral body must be of Northern European complexion, and would be infinitely stronger if it were officially conducted by the Dutch Government. This would incidentally impose a larger obligation as to the export of the native food-supplies from Holland.'

**Hoover insists on the Liquidation of the Commission.**—In another message of the same date (No. 93, February 13), Hoover cabled the London office as follows: 'I wish to make it absolutely clear, and trust you will take the matter up and secure the support of Mr. Page and the British Government in the insistence, that the Commission for Relief in Belgium must be liquidated and disappear except in so far as we may carry it on at this end as a purely benevolent soliciting agency. The whole of the files and accumulated material must remain the property of the New York organisation; we have created its name and traditions, which are a matter of pride and solicitude. In no other way can we draw a clear-cut line between the two eras of Belgian relief, and in no other way can we get a complete liquidation and solution of our accounts and a discharge of our responsibilities except through setting up a new organisation, if the governments do not themselves take over our functions. We must positively refuse to hand over either money, organisation or shipping on any other terms than these. While we have every desire to assist any new organisation to the full extent of our powers, and are prepared to have our staff join such an organisation if they so desire, it must be a clear-cut separation involving complete dissolution.'

**Changes in Hoover's attitude.**—The position taken in these messages by Hoover was quite different than that he had maintained a week previously. Then he proposed that the Commission should continue the external relief operations while turning over the supervision inside the occupied territories to other neutrals. Now he favoured the complete withdrawal of the Commission, a withdrawal of the organisation from the relief work, as well as of the American representatives from the field. He refused absolutely to even consider permitting the Commission to continue in name, under the management of other neutrals.

**The reply of the London Office.**—The London office, in a message of February 14 (No. 143), replied to the two messages quoted above, by stating that they proposed submitting to the allied governments an audited statement of the Commission's affairs as at February 15, 1917, and asking them to accept this as the basis of the Commission's liquidation. If the allied governments agreed to accept this and release the Commission from its responsibilities, the Commission would be willing to continue its services of purchase and transportation until a new agency was provided.

In their cable, No. 147 of February 14, the London office informed Hoover that the Spanish Ambassador, Merry del Val, had taken the position that the Commission continued to exist and had asked the London office to turn over the business to Spanish delegates working under the supervision of the Ambassador. They said: 'Page is inclined not to dispute the claim that the American retirement cannot dissolve the Commission, although he agrees to necessity of complete financial cut-off and discharge of responsibilities of Americans. Percy also wishes Spaniards to continue in work, suggesting Spanish directors and Dutch delegates. . . . What about danger to German agreements with us, as Commission for Relief in Belgium, for etappen and North France if Commission is dissolved? Speyer suggests that although Commission is no legal entity, nevertheless, as executive

responsibility lies on chairman, directors and departmental heads (page 13, Annual Report), they could announce dissolution of Commission. We doubt whether such course would meet the approval of the allied governments.'

**The Question of the Continuation of the Commission.**—The question thus chiefly at issue was whether the withdrawal of the Americans from the relief involved the dissolution of the Commission for Relief in Belgium. The Spanish, and to a certain extent, the Belgian, French and British Governments held that it did not; that the Commission could continue under the supervision of other neutrals who would be chosen to replace the Americans. Hoover, however, and the Americans of the Commission generally, felt that their withdrawal involved the dissolution of the organisation which they had created, controlled and made successful in the face of such tremendous obstacles. However, as Hoover cabled on February 14: 'Our sole desire is to secure the re-establishment of the relief and, despite any views we hold as to the best method and the details of re-organisation, we are absolutely at the service of the allied governments in this matter, and we wish to strongly present the fact that there is nothing which so dominates the heart of the American people and all of us as the continued succour of these people, and there is nothing more important in maintaining the allegiance of America to the allied cause than that no effort should be spared for the re-establishment of the relief.'

**A Message from Berlin.**—On February 15, Hoover, in New York, received a wireless message from the Marquis de Villalobar in Berlin, transmitted by the German Government to the Long Island wireless station.

The Marquis informed Hoover that the German Government had not issued an order requiring Americans to withdraw from the occupied territories; that on the contrary the Germans were anxious to see the work go on as before until a new agency had been organised to replace the Commission. He suggested that Hoover come to Europe to arrange matters.

**Hoover's reply to Villalobar.**—Hoover immediately sent a cable to London to be forwarded to the Marquis de Villalobar in reply to this wireless message. He stated that he could not leave America, but that the Commission was doing everything possible to arrange the re-establishment of the relief work. He continued: 'I am convinced that this can only be accomplished if the German authorities are prepared (1) to allow our staff to remain as before, or to accept some other neutral body in Belgium and Northern France on the same basis of freedom of movement and with the same relations to distribution hitherto enjoyed by our staff. (2) Furthermore, we must have a safe lane opened for our ships to Rotterdam; at the present moment our ships lie loaded in a dozen ports, 70,000 tons of food are in the United Kingdom, 100,000 tons will be loaded here in the next few days and 30,000 tons are afloat. The whole of our service is paralysed until we can guarantee the immunity of our ships, and our resources are being consumed in enormous penalties and demurrages. The only logical lane is via Falmouth and the Channel to Rotterdam. If German submarines are able to distinguish Dutch ships *en route* from Flushing to Southwold and American ships *en route* from New York to Falmouth, there should be no difficulty in continuing this lane by distinguishing our ships between Falmouth and Southwold. The responsibility for the continuance of the relief rests squarely upon the shoulders of the Central Empires, for our ships are prepared to sail and a staff can be quickly re-established under your patronage in Belgium.'

**The Commission decides to continue its Activities.**—Immediately after sending



this message Hoover sent the dispatch (No. 98) to London, quoted in a previous section,\* advising that the orders to withdraw from Belgium be revoked, and that the Commission continue its work until the Germans should compel its representatives to withdraw from the occupied territories.

In a second message from New York, on February 15, Hoover cabled: 'Do not proceed with liquidation, and take no steps whatever beyond those called for by my 98. Generally speaking, adopt a non-committal attitude as to all matters bearing on the Commission's status.'

In a reply on February 15 the London office cabled that Hoover's instructions had been carried out, and that the orders for the liquidation of the Commission's affairs and the withdrawal of its representatives from Belgium had been cancelled.

**Hoover's Recommendations as to the Commission's Attitude.**—A few hours later Hoover cabled from Washington (his No. 10) the result of his conferences there. 'The State Department,' he said, 'are to-night emphatically directing Whitlock to demand the immediate restoration of his own and our position to previous basis, alternative to which is his and our immediate withdrawal, with the whole responsibility on German shoulders. We believe Germans proposed previous stultifying arrangements with intention of throwing on the allied governments or ourselves the responsibility of cutting off the relief. In case they refuse to concede demands, instructions have been given Whitlock to inform the Belgian people that this Government and the Commission will do all in their power to secure re-establishment of the relief in the hands of some other neutral organisation.

'We must proceed in the whole matter with great circumspection, step by step. The first step is outlined above. If Germans give in to our demand, we must proceed as before, although I have little anticipation that it will last for long. The second step, in case we withdraw, is to support the creation of a new neutral organisation to take charge of the distribution. An ideal organisation would be one under the patronage of the Queen of Holland and the King of Spain, but composed entirely of official personnel, preferably officers or civil servants; this new organisation to control distribution in the interior. Third, after a prolonged consideration, I believe that if we withdraw, it will be in the interest of the Belgian people that the whole of the purchase and shipments of foodstuffs should be taken over by the Belgian Lloyd. This would enable them to build up a properly efficient organisation which would be of inestimable benefit for the ravitaillement of Belgium after the war. In this matter, they could take over our paid staff and officers, if they so desired; we of course removing the whole of our records and accounts. Fourth, the Commission should then retreat entirely to a local American organisation for recruiting charity and for propaganda on behalf of the Belgian people. Fifth, the least which the various governments can agree to, in return for our services, is that we should have the honour of liquidating our own business and obtaining a proper discharge from our personal liabilities and the retention of our name and organisation for effective American use. The matter is not only sentimental, but it is of practical importance, in view of legal responsibilities which I personally hold for outstanding liabilities and unsettled operations and the good will here. Sixth, in case of our retirement, the Comité National should extend its operations to include the Rotterdam office, thus joining with the Belgian Lloyd. In any event we must get a shipping lane open at the earliest moment and we anxiously await news regarding it.'

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\* Page 396.

**Comments of the London Office.**—The London office replied on February 16, pointing out to Hoover the diplomatic difficulties in the way of his proposals 'on account of the absolute insistence on the part of the Spanish Ambassador that the old organisation and name are not broken by the withdrawal of the Americans. The allied governments and Mr. Page are not inclined to combat the attitude of the Spanish.' The London office stated that the Commission could dissolve itself in the manner suggested by Speyer and previously reported to Hoover, but that such action would arouse great opposition from the Allied Powers.

In a reply on the same day Hoover cabled from Washington (No. 10) a new project for the reorganisation of the relief. He suggested that a new committee be formed with a name such as 'Comité de Ravitaillement Belge et Français,' under the patronage of the Dutch and Spanish, to take over the paid staff and offices of the Commission. The Americans would then retire from Belgium as soon as other neutrals were found to replace them. The affairs of the Commission would be transferred to this organisation, which would open new books and have new stationery to indicate the change in management. All further subsidies would be paid to this new committee. The Commission would continue in America as a recruiting agency for charity. Hoover believed that such a plan would give the new organisation the advantage of the Commission's position, goodwill, and would maintain existing arrangements while satisfying the desire of the Commission to liquidate and withdraw.

**Negotiations of the London Office.**—While this interchange of messages was going on between Hoover and London, Poland and Kellogg found their hands more than full in the London office in the endeavour to carry on the relief and to negotiate a basis for its continuance. On February 16 the allied governments were officially informed that in view of the changed attitude of the Germans, as announced in the message from Brussels, the Commission had decided not to withdraw immediately. This decision was made, as Mr. Poland wrote M. Roger Cambon of the French Embassy, because the Commission 'assumed from the very kind expressions in regard to the American connection with the relief, that in view of the German reversal of position, you desire to have the Americans continue in their associations with the ravitaillement work in France and Belgium. This has been expressed to us by the representatives of the British and Belgian Governments.' In reply, M. Cambon assured Mr. Poland that the French Government were 'very happy over this decision, and thanked the Commission for agreeing to continue.'

**The Spanish offer to take over the Commission.**—On February 15 the Spanish Ambassador, Merry del Val, wrote to the Belgian Minister and the French Ambassador that, in consequence of the retirement of the Americans from the Commission: 'I have the honour to inform you in my capacity as founder and president of the Commission, that it will be carried on under the administration of their Spanish colleagues.' He continued that M. José Ronra had been chosen to take over the direction of the Commission, and would place himself at the disposal of the allied governments in the belief that the Commission under Spanish direction would continue to receive the same support as it had enjoyed in the past, when Americans were at the helm.

**The reply of the French Ambassador.**—The French Ambassador at once replied, thanking his Excellency Merry del Val for his offer, but assuring him that the changed attitude of the Germans made it possible for the Americans to continue their work. Therefore it seemed to him advisable 'to leave the present direction of the relief to those who

up to the present have carried on the work. This is what the American members of the Commission have been informed this morning, and it would be inopportune, in my opinion, to modify the London direction of the Commission for Relief before certain financial questions at present in suspense have been settled.'

**The Belgian Minister to the C.R.B.**—The Belgian Minister sent a similar reply to the letter he had received from the Spanish Ambassador. In writing to Mr. Poland on February 19, M. Hymans stated that: 'I received this news (that the Americans were not at once withdrawing) with the greatest pleasure, and I am but voicing the sentiments of my government in saying that I feel the utmost satisfaction in knowing that the work of your committee, which has been so admirably and efficiently carried out and by which so many thousands of my compatriots have been saved from misery and privation, is to be continued as hitherto and that no changes will be contemplated at present so far as the management of the committee is concerned.'

**Difficulties in the way of the Commission's Withdrawal.**—Thus the question of the immediate withdrawal of the Commission was settled and the offer of the Spanish immediately to take over the relief was therefore declined. It is doubtful if this offer could have been accepted, because of the many difficulties involved in transferring the financial responsibilities the Commission had assumed under American direction. As Hoover cabled on February 17: 'We could only retire from the control of the Commission upon the provision of a New York bank guarantee of \$20,000,000 to cover every possible contingency that may ever arise against the American members. In any event, it seems to me that in the final emergency it is within our powers without anybody's approval or consent to carry out the programme laid down in my Washington No. 10.' (Quoted at length above.) In the same cable Hoover said that 'obviously the question of liquidation can rest for the present but may arise any moment.'

**The Commission's plans for continuing its Work.**—The London office also cabled Hoover on February 17 that in the event of the withdrawal of the Americans, it was probable that the work would be continued along the lines proposed by Hoover in his messages, and that 'it is now practically certain that Commission as such will be wound up when the Americans withdraw, although the continuance of relief activities will not be interrupted.'

On February 18, Hoover cabled in reply that 'in view of the considerable relaxation in political tension it would be unadvisable to request the Queen of Holland to extend her patronage to the relief work, or to make any definite steps toward reorganisation of the relief.' Indeed, Hoover believed that 'as matters stand to-day we may continue indefinitely.'

Thus, within a week, the Commission had first planned to continue its work with a possible substitution of other neutrals for Americans in the occupied districts; it had then decided to withdraw absolutely and dissolve the organisation. Later advices had caused this decision to be revoked and had induced the Commission to continue its organisation temporarily while a new agency was being formed to carry on the work. Finally, at the end of the week, Hoover cabled advising against taking definite steps for the reorganisation of the relief and stating that the American organisation could probably go on indefinitely.

**Poland's Letter to Hoover.**—At the end of this week, Poland and Dr. Kellogg wrote letters to Hoover giving him full details of the situation in London. Poland stated that he thought the restoration of the *status quo* in Belgium and France is likely to be tem-

porary only, and we should put our house in order at once with a view to getting out.' He said that an audited statement of accounts could not be prepared in less than four months, and asked Hoover what steps should be taken for the continuance of the relief during this period if a new crisis caused the withdrawal of the Americans from Belgium.

**Kellogg's Statement of the situation.**—Kellogg, writing more at length, explained that the political situation in London was such that, 'in the event of the retirement of the Americans, the Spanish element will play a more or less conspicuous part in the future carrying on of the relief work. The Spanish Ambassador has taken active steps to bring this about, even to the point of selecting the man to take over the management of the Commission.' Kellogg thought that 'the French and Belgians favour having the active work done by the Dutch—if no American participation in Rotterdam can be arranged for, which is their strongest wish. They have already taken up the matter to some extent with the Spanish Government, looking to the active patronage of the King of Spain, and they would probably consent to a Spanish manager here in London. The British seem even more ready to have—indeed, are even intent on having—Spanish participation. Mr. Page also holds that Merry del Val has rights, as representing the Spanish element in the Commission as at present constituted, to have considerable voice in determining the future personnel. However, he also clearly holds that our responsibilities are primarily to the allied governments and that we should turn everything over to them, get our clearance papers and be out of it.'

**A new plan for the Continuance of the Relief.**—Kellogg also informed Hoover that a new plan was under discussion to form an Anglo-American organisation to look after the work of relief outside Belgium, in the event of the retirement of the Americans from the Commission. The American participation in this joint organisation would consist in the use of Americans, acting as business men, in connection with a strictly business arrangement. Some of the chief supporters of the relief in Great Britain insisted that such an arrangement should be made in order to ensure the practical efficiency of the future relief operations. Kellogg thought that Lord Eustace Percy, in spite of political pressure in favour of Spanish control, favoured such a solution of the problem of continuing the relief.

#### THE DECISION TO LEAVE EXTERNAL RELIEF OPERATIONS IN THE HANDS OF THE C.R.B.

**Official News from Berlin.** On February 23 the Spanish Ambassador in London transmitted to Mr. Poland a communication from the German Government in Berlin, dated February 18, concerning the work of the Commission. He said that the 'German Government declare that in spite of having broken off diplomatic relations with the United States, the humanitarian work of the Relief in Belgium, founded on an agreement to which Spain also is a party, may continue, and the German Government consider it convenient that the present American members of the Commission should also remain provisionally at their posts. This will not prevent the possibility of their replacement, if necessary, by other neutral agents being examined. There is no reason why some of these American citizens should not remain in Brussels at the head of the Commission until further notice.'

In the same letter his Excellency Merry del Val also stated that the German Government refused to grant Commission ships protection in the barred zone, and insisted that

all relief cargoes must go around the North of Scotland and thence to Rotterdam in the channel of 'free' waters.

**The necessity for the Continuance of the Commission's Activities.**—These official statements from Berlin finally set at rest any notion that may have prevailed that the Americans were to withdraw immediately from the relief. Indeed, as the days passed, it became ever more clear that, in view of the great practical difficulties involved in the transfer of the relief from one agency to another, it would be practically imperative to retain the American direction of the relief outside the occupied territories even after the withdrawal of the Americans from Belgium.

**An appeal from M. Carton de Wiart.**—M. le Chevalier E. Carton de Wiart, financial delegate of the Belgian Government to the Commission in London, who had been in almost daily co-operation with the American directors since November 1914, clearly expressed this conviction in a message to Hoover on February 17. He cabled: 'Allow me to state again how important I consider both the American and Belgian point of view, that the management of the relief be continued up to the end by Americans so far as is physically possible. Even if you eventually abandon activity in Belgium, the external activity is of essential importance, diplomatically, charitably and materially. If external activity of relief were transformed into a purely business organisation, the character of the whole work would be affected by it. I fervently hope the direct co-operation of our American friends will last as long as our trials, thus to remain for ever closely associated with them in the memory of the Belgian people.'

**The attitude of the Belgian Government.**—There can be no doubt that M. Carton de Wiart expressed the opinion of his Government and his people. He had long been in touch with the work of the Commission outside Belgium, and hence realised the better what it had accomplished and the insuperable difficulties any new organisation would have encountered. M. Carton de Wiart had often in the past been of the greatest assistance to the Commission, and he used his influence now to secure the continuance of the American direction of the relief even after the withdrawal of the Americans from Belgium.

**Hoover's Reply.**—Hoover, in replying to M. Carton de Wiart's message, said he had acted under the impression 'that it was the desire and the interest of the Comité National and the Belgian Government that the Belgians should take over as many features of the relief as possible,' and that he had believed that in the event of the Americans leaving Belgium 'a favourable opportunity would be offered for such a transition.' However, all changes were for a time postponed.

**Carton de Wiart makes a Second Appeal.**—On receiving this reply, M. Carton de Wiart again cabled Hoover, on February 23, as follows: 'Have communicated your cable to Van de Vyver, who asks me to assure you that Belgian Government counts more than ever on the co-operation of our American friends, and, moreover, hopes to associate very closely the Commission for Relief in Belgium with the economic reconstruction of Belgium and wishes to confer with you as soon as possible on the subject. Messages received from the Comité National indicate most positively their great desire and hope that American co-operation will remain in as many features of the relief as possible. This unanimous feeling amongst us is based not only on Belgian interest, but also on Belgian feeling for America.'

**The London Office Proposals.**—After further conferences in London with representatives of the allied governments, the London office cabled Hoover on February 25,

that these governments were anxious to perfect immediately the arrangements to be put into effect when the Americans ultimately withdrew. These governments had already requested the patronage of the King of Spain and the Queen of Holland. They proposed the establishment of an Inter-Allied Relief Committee in London, composed of representatives of England, France and Belgium, to receive subsidies and the donations by the National Committee in the British Empire and by the Commission in the United States. This committee would purchase all food and transport it to Rotterdam. There it would be turned over to a Spanish-Dutch Relief Committee. This would have a Dutch shipping director in Holland, and representatives in London, with purely diplomatic functions, in addition to the organisation for the supervision of distribution inside the occupied territories. The Inter-Allied Committee would establish an office in New York in connection with the American Commission. The Spanish and Dutch diplomatic representatives would make arrangements for the issuance of the German safe-conducts and passports to relief vessels. The Commission would be liquidated and dissolved and its name would be perpetuated only by the American Commission for Relief in Belgium in the United States. The actual result of the arrangement thus proposed would be to put the practical control of the relief in the hands of the Inter-Allied Committee, while securing the diplomatic patronage and protection of Spain and Holland for the operations inside the occupied territories.

**Hoover's Reply.**— On a reply on February 27 (No. 129), Hoover again expressed his desire that the Americans should continue their work until it was absolutely necessary to withdraw. 'Whitlock,' he said, 'is being instructed by the State Department to remain in Belgium as long as the American members of the Commission remain, and when the situation arrives at the point where he must withdraw, either because of German request or from views of this Government on the situation, he will be instructed to bring the Relief Commission with him.' Hoover was extremely anxious that the Americans should not leave Belgium until ordered to do so either by the Germans or by the State Department. He was quite in accord with the proposals in the message of the London office for the continuance of the work when the Americans ultimately withdrew. As there was no pressing necessity to complete arrangements for the Inter-Allied Committee, however, he asked that the Commission be not committed in any way as yet to the proposed arrangement.

The London office immediately replied that they would be guided by Hoover's desire. His message was transmitted to Mr. Gregory at Brussels for the guidance of the men inside Belgium.

**Hoover changes his attitude.**— On March 1 a further cable (No. 135) from Hoover revealed the fact that he had again completely changed his mind about the Commission's future, and had again come to the conviction that the Commission for Relief in Belgium should continue its external operations after the withdrawal from the occupied territories. 'In view of Belgian protests and changed conditions here, and after careful consideration and consultation with important men, I have come to the view that despite the apparent reversal of our previous attitude . . . it is our duty despite the sacrifice and many opposing arguments—if it is approved by the allied governments—to carry on the Commission under the present direction with our terminal at Rotterdam.' Hoover asked the London office to lay the entire matter before Lord Eustace Percy and to receive the frank opinion of the allied governments. He also stated that the administrative arrangements at the Rotterdam terminal would require consideration. It was questionable whether the Commission for Relief in Belgium should maintain offices there and handle all

supplies as far as the Belgian frontier or should transfer them to the Dutch-Spanish Committee at Rotterdam.

Hoover said he was not sure but that eventually the developments might make it desirable to establish an Inter-Allied Committee to take over the Commission's work outside Belgium ; but pending developments he thought it to be in the best interests of the Belgians, the Allies and the Americans that the relief should continue on the old basis as long as possible.

**Hoover's new proposals accepted.**— Poland immediately informed Lord Eustace Percy of the cable from Hoover. He learned at once that the allied governments entirely approved Hoover's suggestion. As Poland cabled to Hoover on March 3: 'The French, Belgian and British Governments have expressed a positive desire that in the event of withdrawal from Belgium and France, the Americans continue in control to or including Rotterdam, as may be necessary.'

In a message of March 2, Mr. W. A. M. Goode and Mr. Shirley Benn, M.P., of the British National Committee for Relief in Belgium, informed Hoover that 'you may take it for granted that nothing would suit the allied governments better than that the American Commission should continue outside the occupied territories, in the event of their withdrawal from inside. The Inter-Allied Committee and other proposals have been mere'y attempts to cope with the hopelessly complicated situation which would have arisen from a complete American withdrawal. Regarding your suggestion that sole agency in distribution should be given to Dutch, there are conditions which make this impossible.'

**Hoover requests formal statements from the Allied Governments.**— Hoover immediately replied to the message of the London office, cabling that he considered it important to have formal statements from the allied governments approving the continuation of the American control of the relief outside Belgium. With regard to the supervision of the work inside, Hoover stated that the Swiss Government had proposed to the American Government that they were willing to take over the internal administration of the work in the North of France, and asked that the allied governments express their opinion of this arrangement. Hoover wanted especially to know whether the Allies favoured a single control of a Dutch-Spanish committee in both Belgium and Northern France or would prefer that the Swiss Government take over the work in Northern France. He asked that Goode and other British friends of the Commission be informed that the previous intention on the part of the Commission to withdraw had been determined by the desire 'to give the Belgian Government the opportunity to carry out what we were convinced had been their ambition for the last eighteen months—that is, to take over the purchase and transport by the Government in order to advance Belgian prestige and to demonstrate to the world and to the people in Belgium their self-sufficiency ; and, furthermore, we desired to make it perfectly clear that we could not embrace in Commission other neutrals in control in Belgium and France under our direction and responsibility. The projected erection of Spanish-Dutch or Swiss committees for control purposes having their own responsibilities to the allied governments relieves this situation. It is our belief that in case of our withdrawal from Belgium, we should entirely control the Rotterdam office and debit foodstuffs direct to the Comité National and the Comité Français through their representative in Rotterdam, we to deliver over Belgian frontier.'

**The statement of the French Government.**— On receiving this message from Hoover, Mr. Poland immediately approached the allied governments with a view of getting

formal expressions from them of their desire for the continuation of the American control of the external relief operations.

The representatives of the Allied Powers immediately responded. On March 5, M. Paul Cambon, French Ambassador in London, wrote: 'I have already repeatedly had occasion to express to the London office of the Commission for Relief in Belgium, the value which the French Government attaches to the work undertaken by the organisation that you direct.

'At the present moment events threaten to render it impossible that Americans should remain in the invaded districts. Nevertheless, the continuation of the Commission for Relief in Belgium outside these territories would be welcomed with the deepest favour by the French Government.

'M. Briand has encharged me with giving you this assurance, adding that the maintenance of the present organisation entirely fulfils his desires.'

**The statement of the Belgian Government.**—On March 7, M. Hymans, the Belgian Minister, wrote in similar vein. 'I have learned with deep satisfaction,' he said, 'that Mr. Hoover and his colleagues have consented to maintain, as far as is possible, the present organisation of the Commission for Relief. He, himself, and his colleagues, will continue to exercise their most useful functions at Rotterdam and at London, even in case of a complete rupture between the United States and Germany.

'I am charged by the Government of the King to inform the Commission that it approves this solution most earnestly. It seems to be the best method of securing the efficient continuance of the work of ravitaillement.'

**The British statement.**—The British Government at once cabled the Ambassador in Washington to express to the State Department and to Hoover the appreciation with which they accepted the offer of the Commission to continue its work outside Belgium. In a letter of March 8 to Hoover, Sir Cecil Spring-Rice quoted the message. The Foreign Office stated that 'At the time of the threatened withdrawal of the Americans from Belgium the Relief Commission stated emphatically that they must in that event liquidate and retire wholly from any participation in the work in London and Rotterdam. In view of this, we have been endeavouring to sketch an Inter-Allied organisation in England and a Dutch organisation in Holland, which would, to some extent, protect us from having to accept all the business of control. We have not communicated with Hoover or the United States Government, as we understood that, though they were most anxious to continue American interest so far as raising money was concerned, they wished to disclaim all responsibility for any organisation in London or Rotterdam designed to succeed them. Now Mr. Hoover has telegraphed to the Commission here that on consideration he has reversed his former view and would be willing that Americans should remain in charge of the London and Rotterdam offices. Such a solution would be a great relief to us, because the constitution of any new competent organisation at these two places would, we have found, inevitably create friction with the Spanish Government owing to the ambiguous nominal constitution of the existing Commission. If Americans remain in control we shall of course be glad to arrange for it to be made clear that their responsibilities after the withdrawal of their delegates from the occupied territories are fundamentally different from previous responsibilities. If the American Commission finally decides to adopt this course, with the approval of the American Government, we should be glad to be placed in a position to notify the Spanish and Netherlands Governments to this effect.'



**Kellogg's report from Brussels.**— Dr. Kellogg had gone to Rotterdam on February 27, and from there into Brussels a few days later, at the urgent request of the Americans, Belgians and Germans alike. He endeavoured to arrange with the Germans for the future conditions of the relief work. While in Rotterdam he received from London the substance of Hoover's cable of March 1. A few days later, he was asked by the London office to get a positive statement from Brussels as to the attitude of the various people toward the continuance of the American control of the relief. After consultations with the German authorities and representatives of the French and Belgian committees, Kellogg telegraphed London on March 7: 'There seems to be a general pressure from the Germans, French and Belgians to retain the American control of the ravitaillement even in case of war, and even by allowing American directors and perhaps one or two men to remain in Brussels, and by keeping London and Rotterdam staffs intact. Villalobar and Francqui make strong representations in favour of this plan. The men who remain in Brussels will be guaranteed protection by the Germans.'

**The decision of the Commission to continue.**—This message was transmitted to Hoover on March 8 by the London office. Thus, within a week from the despatch of Hoover's message of March 1, the offer of the Commission to continue its activities in the event of the withdrawal from Belgium had been accepted with expressions of appreciation by all the governments concerned and by the French and Belgian committees in the occupied districts. The Germans were more than willing to see the Americans continue the work. In the two years and more of work they had learned to know and trust the American directors of the Commission. They were undoubtedly very anxious lest the relief work should stop and wanted the influence of America to ensure its continuance.

**Hoover's explanation of his attitude.**—In a letter to Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, on March 9, Hoover acknowledged the letter of March 8, and explained the reasons which had led the Americans of the Commission first to decide on withdrawal and then to reverse their decision and agree to carry on the work. He said the Americans had decided to withdraw because they felt the Belgians would prefer to take over the whole relief, and that when they found this not to be the case and learned the difficulties created by the necessity of creating a new agency they felt it was their duty to the allied governments to continue their work. Hoover also said that he was leaving for Europe in a few days to take up the question of the reorganisation of the relief work and to make arrangements for the continuance of the Commission's activities.

**The necessity for prompt action.**— On the same day, March 9, Hoover received a message from London urging the importance of prompt action. The London office, after consultation with M. Chevrillon, who had come from Paris at the request of Mr. Poland, stated that in their opinion 'we should liquidate the present basis of our work at once, while carrying on the work as before under American control to Rotterdam, basing our withdrawal from Belgium and France on the impossibility of carrying out our guarantees and obligations, due to diminished privileges and interruption of our services by the Germans. Otherwise the psychological moment may pass when we can retire as a body. We believe Germans are using dilatory tactics for the purpose of complicating shipping situation and forcing British action in unloading cargoes which will enable them to make possible reprisals, ending relief, and by clever compromises with our directors in Belgium and France get us in a position where we cannot charge withdrawal to them. Spanish Minister contends that after our withdrawal the Spanish are the Commission. The allied

governments practically accept this view against our emphatic disclaimer. Advise position to be taken in this question, also what position should we take in the event of the failure of the Allies to furnish increased subsidies, and what assistance is possible from the States.'

**The situation in Belgium.**—On March 7 the London office had cabled to Hoover the news received from Kellogg that 'Whitlock, without waiting until war, is urging withdrawal of all Americans as soon as possible, while Gregory is in favour of all men remaining until the break comes. Berlin is to be immediately urged by Villalobar to give a written guarantee to the Spanish Government that all Americans may leave at the outbreak of war.' Hoover had been previously informed that the delegates for Northern France had not been at their posts for a month, and that Whitlock's diplomatic privileges had not been restored.\*

In the message of March 7 the London office had further cabled that the Germans were publishing orders in France, concerning food distribution, without consulting the Commission, and that it was consequently immediately necessary that neutral representatives, preferably Dutch, be sent to Northern France. Ambassador Page agreed that the American delegates should either return immediately to their districts or should be permanently withdrawn. He thought that it should be made a condition of the Americans returning that they should not be subject to any conditions as to internment, should have full previous privileges and should have a guarantee of immediate safe conduct out of the country in the case of the withdrawal of Americans from Belgium and France. The British and French Governments were withholding action in regard to substituting other neutrals, at Poland's request, until Hoover was heard from. The London office thought the condition of a short period of 'quarantine' could be accepted, provided the safe conducts were issued. They urged on Hoover the importance of his prompt return to London on account of the many grave decisions pending. 'We consider the lack of immediate clear-cut action in urgent matters constantly developing may seriously affect the standing of the Commission, which is traversing the greatest crisis in its history. If Hoover cannot return, we should receive authority, in accord with Mr. Page, to deal finally here, without reference to New York, when necessary.'

**Hoover insists that the Commission continue.**—Hoover replied to this message on March 8, agreeing that a demand should be made on the Germans, either to return the Americans to France with full control, on a written undertaking to the Spanish Minister that they have a safe conduct out of the country in case of withdrawal, after a week or two of 'quarantine' *en route*, or to permit other neutrals to take their places in Northern France. Hoover stated that he expected to sail in a few days for London via Spain, and asked the London office to cable him 'what are the impending grave decisions you refer to? Bear in mind that no decisions of any import can now be taken without co-ordination with Washington, whose responsibility and co-operation we must rigidly maintain, not only through Mr. Page, but also through the New York office, who are advised of Washington's actions from aspects which cannot be known in London. Washington some days ago made the formal demand on Berlin through the Spanish Government for definite undertakings of safe conducts out for our men at any time they may be withdrawn, and if they do not get an early response, Washington will order the withdrawal of the entire staff for this reason alone.'

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\* Messages—No. 194, London to New York, March 3, 1917; No. 202, London to New York, March 7, 1917.

The London office then cabled, on March 8, instructions to the Brussels office to demand that the representatives be returned in full control to Northern France under the conditions agreed upon. If the Germans refused, it would be necessary to permanently withdraw the men from Northern France immediately and substitute other neutral control.

**The question of Withdrawing Americans from Northern France.**—On March 9 the London office cabled Hoover, asking if the representatives should be withdrawn from Belgium as well as France in case of the refusal of the Germans to permit the delegates to return to France. They also wanted to know whether the instructions to withdraw should be given by the London office or the State Department, and whether in case of withdrawal they should insist that a neutral body under a new name take over the control inside, retaining the term 'Commission for the Relief in Belgium' for the American operations outside.

**Page's cable to the State Department.** Ambassador Page intervened on March 9 with a cable to the State Department urging that the men be withdrawn from Belgium and France. He said: 'If when the break occurred with the Germans the Commission had withdrawn and remained out, it is clear the blame would have fallen on Germany. It is clearly shown by the controversies and entanglements that have come about that the Germans are manoeuvring to discredit and eject the Commission by throwing the blame on it. . . . In my judgment the delay in withdrawing will result in the humiliation of the Commission and its ejection. According to Kellogg there is hopeless conflict and confusion in Brussels. The Belgians, even in case of war, wish the Americans to remain. Gregory, until war is declared, is in favour of remaining. Whitlock wished to withdraw immediately. In the meantime neither the northern nor the southern route to Rotterdam is safe. I request the department for instructions and will await them before acting.'

**Kellogg's report of the situation in Belgium.**—A full account of the situation inside Belgium at this time was given in a cable sent to the London office from Rotterdam by Kellogg on March 10. He reported that Baron von der Lancken had given a positive assurance, in the name of General von Bissing, that in case of war all American members of the Commission would leave immediately via Switzerland after an 'immunity bath' of one or two weeks at a good hotel in some place in Belgium or Germany. 'Lancken authorises me to state this assurance in his name to Hoover and to the American Government, and he promises to give the same in writing to Villalobar at once as coming from the German to the Spanish Government. For the men in Northern France the same assurance is given by Wengersky, but with a longer immunity bath of from three to four weeks; he has gone to the new great headquarters to get official confirmation. Gregory and I decided not to return our men to Northern France; thus they require bath of one to two weeks only, as they are now on the same footing as men in Belgium. We are arranging to send Spanish and Dutch consuls to districts of Northern France immediately. Comité National is sending an urgent formal request to Commission that Americans continue as long as possible the work in London, Rotterdam and Belgium. Lancken also requests this for the General Government. It is Whitlock's understanding that until further orders he is to remain. He has no pouch, no flag and no diplomatic position. Gregory and all of the men are in good spirits and are keeping the fine work going.'

**Franco's Letter to Hoover.**—In a letter, dated March 9, M. Franco urged on Hoover the importance of continuing the participation of the Americans in the work. He thus confirmed Kellogg's messages and gave the Commission a further assurance that the

services of the Americans should be continued. Franequi stated that he had conferred with Kellogg on the situation, and that 'you, he and Gregory, and all the Americans disprove the old proverb, "Friends surround you in prosperity; in misfortune they leave you to yourself."' Franequi reported also that, in conferences with Gregory, they had agreed on 'the necessity of maintaining intact the authority of the Commission for Relief in Belgium and of preventing its influence and its activity in our country from passing into the hands of neutrals belonging to one single nationality.' He therefore proposed that the Commission should replace its representatives inside the occupied territories by citizens of several neutral countries, but should continue in control of all operations. 'After having conferred with Dr. Kellogg, I remain convinced that this solution is the only good one. . . . In the name of the Comité National I beg you to secure the adhesion of your colleagues to this proposition. During the crisis which we are now traversing, we have been able to appreciate once more the value of the services which you and your colleagues incessantly render us. We can in no way better testify our gratitude toward than by urging you with all our strength to abandon nothing of the charitable and effective part that you have played in comforting our afflicted fellow-citizens. We all earnestly desire the Commission for Relief in Belgium to preserve the exclusive direction of the delicate operations which it has carried on for two and a-half years with so much zeal and skill. It seems to us that it would be opposed to the national energy, of which you have given such wonderful examples to the entire world, to give up such an enterprise to which you and your country have devoted yourselves so long a time with such self-forgetfulness and generosity. I know that it is not your intention to separate yourselves altogether from it. I beg you again to give up nothing that you have done up to the present, for fear of compromising a task which I am persuaded is now your joy and which in the future will be your glory.'

At this time the question of securing delegates of other nationalities to replace eventually the Americans in Belgium was causing increasing difficulty inside Belgium. International complications arose over the question of whether the new delegates should be of Dutch or Spanish nationality. The Brussels office therefore cabled to London on March 10 stating the situation and asking instructions. The London office in turn referred the matter to Hoover.

In reply to this message and to the other messages referred to above, Hoover cabled on March 11, insisting that no steps whatever be taken looking to the withdrawal of the American members of the Commission. He stated that the State Department felt strongly that the work should continue under American control until the Americans were compelled to leave the occupied territories, by the Germans, or were instructed to leave by Washington. Hoover continued: 'We are in absolute accord with our government in this matter and trust our staff will act accordingly. We cannot agree to your proposals for any initiative or steps toward liquidation in any direction, on our part, and this idea should not be entertained for a minute. This Commission has now become a national trust with an enormous attention and public opinion behind it, and any voluntary withdrawal on our part would impress the American people as cowardly. Furthermore, no matter what the difficulties may be by way of international conflict over Commission questions, it is not for us to do otherwise than simply advocate in detail remedy of these matters without threats and continue absolutely at our posts until the Commission has been suppressed by some superior force or until we have been recalled by our own government. I do

trust that you will accept this as the absolute complete policy of the Commission and that no steps whatever be taken varying from this steadfast intention to carry this work through if it is humanly possible; for it is not only a service to the Allies, but even more a service to the American people and their ideals in this critical time. You need have no anxiety of the Spanish, since so long as we stay at our posts we control the situation. All questions of increased finance, increased shipping or interference with shipping, may be left over until my arrival if you cannot by simple persuasion secure favourable solution in the meantime.'

In another cable of the same date Hoover stated that he had referred the situation in the North of France to the State Department, and that a decision as to action to be taken by the Commission would be reached in a few days. Should action become necessary before word was received from Washington, the London office should take written instructions from the Foreign Office and act accordingly.

The London office replied on March 12 to these messages, assuring Hoover that the position he outlined would receive complete support from the London office, and congratulating him on having secured the strong support of the United States Government. They also informed Hoover that in the event of the withdrawal of the American delegates from Northern France, the allied governments had requested the Commission to replace them temporarily by Dutch delegates to be selected by the Commission, who would act merely as representatives of the Americans. The allied governments suggested the same action in the event of withdrawal from Belgium, though the inclusion of the Swiss was being discussed in Paris with the French Government. Hoover cabled briefly in reply, on March 12, that he approved the sending of Dutch delegates to France, if Americans should not return.

Contemporaneously with Hoover's message to the London office of March 11, the State Department cabled Ambassador Page substantially the same recommendations. 'The department agrees with the view strongly held by Hoover that the Commission for Relief has now become a national matter, and that any action taken by it to bring about a cessation of its work or a voluntary liquidation would have a disastrous effect on public opinion.'

The Department stated that until Hoover's arrival in London (about March 24) no action should be taken looking toward withdrawal. The Minister in Brussels had been instructed that pending further instructions he should take no steps toward the withdrawal of the Americans and that the Commission should continue its work.

After the receipt of these messages from Hoover and the State Department, the London office cabled Brussels (on March 12) repeating Hoover's instructions. The Brussels and Rotterdam offices were informed that: 'In case of departure of Americans from France and Belgium, operations are to be continued by the Commission to the frontier and possibly also into Belgium and France under Commission control through other neutral representatives responsible to us but under the protection of a neutral body. Arrangements regarding neutrals to replace Americans in Belgium in event withdrawal will be forwarded in a day or two. Please take no steps meanwhile.'

Thus, on March 12 the Commission was still planning to continue its work as long as possible and no plans had yet been adopted for the withdrawal of the Americans.

## THE DEPARTURE OF THE AMERICAN DELEGATES FROM BELGIUM.

**The Commission's Plans, March 12.**—Four weeks of negotiations had, by March 12, led to a definite decision by the Commission as to its future operations. This decision had been approved by all the governments concerned. The Commission was to continue its work as before until such time as it became necessary for the American delegates to leave the occupied territories. Such a withdrawal would take place, however, only if it were compelled by the Germans or ordered from Washington. Other neutrals—probably Dutch—would be selected by the Commission and sent into Belgium to replace the Americans withdrawn. These neutrals were to report to the Commission temporarily. In the event of the permanent withdrawal of all the Americans, a Spanish-Dutch committee would be formed to continue supervision of the guarantees. This committee would have an office in Rotterdam, through which it would report to the Commission for Relief in Belgium. It would be directly responsible to the allied governments for the supervision of relief operations in the occupied territories, but would assume no financial responsibility. This would continue to be borne by the Commission for Relief in Belgium outside and by the Comité National and Comité Français inside the occupied territories.

Such in brief was the plan of procedure outlined by Mr. Poland to the Foreign Office in a letter of March 12. There was no intention on the part of the Commission to take any steps with the object of arranging the withdrawal of the American delegates, but there was a determination to ensure the continuance of the relief work under any conditions the future might bring forth.

**The International Situation.**—At this time (March 12) there seemed indeed to be no immediate prospect of a declaration of war by the United States. Congress was not in session, and unless something should happen it seemed more than probable that *status quo* might be maintained for a long period—perhaps for months. For this reason, and in view of the decided views of Mr. Hoover, no effort was made to bring about the organization of a Spanish-Dutch committee, or to secure other neutral delegates to replace Americans, except in the districts of Northern France.

**The necessity for replacing the delegates in Northern France.**—In Northern France, because of the nearness of the districts to the front, the Germans had refused definitely to permit the Americans to return on the old basis. They would no longer be allowed to go to and fro between Brussels and their posts, would have their freedom of movement in France restricted, and in the case of an eventual withdrawal would be obliged to remain in quarantine for a month or more. Mr. Gregory had therefore held them in Brussels. The Germans took advantage of this immediately by beginning to exercise a direct control over the food distribution. The Commission, therefore, impressed with the necessity of finding other neutrals immediately to send to Northern France, decided to select six Dutch delegates for these posts.

**Diplomatic difficulties.**—At once, however, a delicate diplomatic situation arose. The allied governments had insisted that the Commission should secure Dutch delegates, but the Spanish Minister in Brussels and his colleague in London, who had been honorary members and patrons of the Commission from the beginning of its activity, thought that at least four of the six delegates to go to France should be Spanish. In view of the great services the Marquis de Villalobar had rendered to the relief, the Commission were naturally not inclined to take any action in the matter of securing new delegates that would displease

him and that he would regard as a slight. The Commission therefore placed the problem before the allied governments for solution (in cables of March 10, 11 and 12 from Brussels).

**The Spanish Minister selects new delegates.**—Meanwhile, the Spanish Minister, not content with diplomatically insisting on the Spanish being represented in the choice of the new delegates, went a step further and produced in Belgium or from Holland five gentlemen of Spanish nationality to replace the American delegates in the North of France. They presented themselves one day early in March, at the office of the Commission in Brussels, announcing that they had been selected by the Spanish Minister as new delegates for the relief. The Commission had had no intimation of the action of the Minister and were naturally very much surprised, as no definite decision had yet been reached to replace any of the American delegates. The Spanish delegates were therefore advised to wait until there were vacancies to be filled. The Brussels office at once reported the incident to London and asked that the situation be cleared up as quickly as possible.

Kellogg, who was still in Belgium, cabled on March 12 that ‘because of Villalobar’s insistence on having a Spanish majority in Northern France, and the French Government’s wish to have only Dutch there, trouble is in sight.’

**The attitude of the Allied Governments.**—The French Government had informed M. Chevillon on the same day that they wished Dutch delegates appointed for Northern France, in preference to either Swiss or Spanish. They desired, however, that the Commission should retain complete management and control and should simply appoint neutral staffs to replace the Americans in the event of their withdrawal. These staffs should be entirely under the direction of the Commission.\*

In reply to Mr. Poland’s letter of March 12, referred to above, Lord Eustace Percy wrote, on March 13, expressing practically the same point of view as that of the French. ‘In fact,’ he said, ‘the only thing that we can lay down is that in the event of it being necessary for the Americans to withdraw from France, or both Belgium and France, it is for the chairman and directors of the Commission for Relief in Belgium to appoint delegates to replace them.’ He continued that the Foreign Office were not officially concerned with the nationality of the delegates, but agreed that it would be best at the moment to select young Dutch University men to replace the Americans in Northern France, if these were obliged to withdraw.

**Hoover’s instructions.**—On March 13, also, Hoover cabled that the State Department ‘considers it advisable to replace Northern France men with Dutch. We therefore agree to your plan that we should recruit six Dutchmen simply as members of our staff.’

The London Office sent Hoover’s message on to Rotterdam, instructing the Directors Brown, Kellogg, and, if possible, Gregory, to proceed to the selection of six Dutch delegates. They said, further, that the details of a permanent organisation to replace the Commission inside the occupied territories would be left until Hoover’s arrival, at the end of the month; that both the Foreign Office and the French Embassy concurred in this action.

**The situation at Brussels.**—In the meanwhile, the same state of uncertainty into which the members of the Commission inside Belgium had been thrown in the first week of February continued to prevail. The changing tenor of the messages that passed back and forth gave a new turn to affairs almost every day. Conferences with the Germans

\* Letter of Chevillon to London Office, March 12.

and with the leaders of the Comité National were frequently held. The Germans appeared to be extremely anxious to work out a *modus vivendi* to ensure the continuation of imports for the relief, and readily assented to the continuance of American control. They even went so far as to agree to permit this control to continue even in the event of war between Germany and the United States. But Mr. Gregory believed it unwise for any Americans to remain in Brussels in the event of a declaration of war. He therefore did not accept this suggestion.

**Plans for continuing the Relief after the Withdrawal.**—He and the other Americans in Belgium were convinced, however, that the situation could not long remain unchanged. They believed that a declaration of war must soon come, and were therefore very anxious that some plan be worked out immediately to provide for the continuation of the relief in the interval between the withdrawal of the Americans on a declaration of war and the organisation of a Spanish-Dutch committee to take over their work.

Kellogg, in a message of March 13 to Hoover, sent via the London office, outlined a plan by which the work could be carried on during this interval. He stated that it was the 'general desire of the Comité National and the Germans that in the event of the retirement of the Americans, Gray should remain, and, with Baetens, control from Brussels the work of other neutrals inside Belgium and Northern France. Germans will give guarantees for Gray's safety and withdrawal when he desires, and Gray is willing, but I consider his position would inevitably be uncomfortable. Would Hoover and American Government consent to Gray remaining?'

**The New York office approves the plan.**—The New York office, in reply, cabled (March 14) that Hoover had sailed for Europe, but that the proposal for Gray to remain in Belgium was consistent with 'the Government's and Hoover's latest intention, which is that you should start as soon as opportunity offers to gradually replace our men in Belgium as well as in France with Dutchmen. The question of Gray remaining, however, can probably be kept open until Mr. Hoover's arrival, since acute developments seem improbable for at least a fortnight. Suggest in meantime you endeavour to get guarantees as to Gray from Berlin.'

The Brussels office, therefore, proceeded to arrange for the work to be carried on as long as possible by the American personnel, but took steps also to secure the guarantee from Berlin as to Gray's security in the period that would follow the withdrawal of the American Minister and the bulk of the members of the Commission. The Germans in Brussels assured both Mr. Gregory and the Marquis de Villalobar that the safe-conducts from the Foreign Minister would be forthcoming. The Marquis offered, as an additional protection, to make Gray officially an attaché of his Legation.

**Safe conducts and passes for the Americans.**—As it was evident at the beginning of March that American representatives would not be again admitted to Northern France on the old basis, Mr. Gregory and Dr. Kellogg took steps to secure passports for the delegates who had been in France and for several of the delegates in Belgium. On March 12, the same day that Kellogg and Gregory received the definite authorisation from the London office to select Dutch delegates for Northern France, the Marquis de Villalobar received from the Baron von der Lancken the official confirmation of the promise that safe-conduct passes would 'in all cases be delivered to the American members of the Commission for Relief in Belgium (a list of the delegates being attached) whenever they ask for it, and whatever the situation may be at the moment between Germany and the United States of America.



However, a guarantee for a period of not more than four weeks will be necessary before the departure to satisfy the military interests.'

**Northern France delegates and the French refugees.**—Gregory, writing on March 13, stated that this arrangement was quite satisfactory and that the men in Belgium would therefore continue to discharge their duties as before, while the men of Northern France would probably be replaced by others as soon as the latter arrived. In the meantime they would be used to assist in the handling of the thousands of French evacués who were at this time being moved back into Belgium by the Germans from the territory about Saint Quentin, La Fère, Noyon and Laon from which the German armies were at the time withdrawing.

**The selection of Dutch delegates.**—Meanwhile steps were taken to select the six Dutch delegates for the posts in Northern France. Dr. Kellogg went out to Holland on March 14 and on the following day had interviews with the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Jonkheer Loudon, with Sir Walter Townley, the British Minister, and with M. Allize, the French Minister. They agreed that the Commission should itself select the men to go into Belgium, from among the candidates recommended by the Dutch Government. Kellogg cabled London on March 15 that he and Director Brown of Rotterdam would immediately select six delegates, and submit their names to the German authorities in Belgium for approval, and that as soon as the Germans accepted them and issued passports, they would be formally appointed representatives of the Commission and sent to Brussels.

On March 17 Kellogg and Brown met a number of the young Dutchmen recommended to them and picked seven of them to go into Belgium. The Brussels office was informed by the German authorities that passports would be granted to these seven men and notified Rotterdam to this effect. As it was not desired to keep the Americans who had been in Northern France in Belgium any longer than necessary, application was at once made for passports to Switzerland for them.

**Passports for the North of France delegates.**—In a letter of March 19, Mr. Gregory wrote to Rotterdam office that 'Passports have been issued for the Dutchmen that you name and they may come in at any time, but it is first necessary to clear up the situation with the Spanish Minister. He states that he had a telegram yesterday (Sunday) from his government insisting that four Spanish delegates go to Northern France and that his government has telegraphed Paris and London to this effect.' Seven of the American delegates, Kittredge, Fletcher, Potter, Maverick, Percy, Maurice and Leach have secured their passports to go to Switzerland via a two-weeks' stay at Baden-Baden, but it has not yet been determined what day they will leave. I am loath to have them go until the new men have been in here for a day or two with them, particularly as I can see that such a large number going at one time will make quite a gap in our small family.'

**The Diplomatic impasse.** In concluding the letter, Mr. Gregory stated that he did not consider it advisable to have the Dutchmen come in 'until the four Spanish delegates have been in some way settled, as ten of them at one time would be a little embarrassing.'

The diplomatic complications over the nationality of the new delegates to replace the Americans in France increased in the next few days. On March 20 the Rotterdam office, on receiving Gregory's letter quoted above, cabled the substance of it to the London office and asked the French Minister, M. Allize, to take up the question of the delegates for Northern France with Madrid through Paris. The London office replied on March 21

instructing the Brussels and Rotterdam offices to take the position that 'Villalobar has not now and never has had anything to do with the appointment of Commission delegates, or with sending men. This position will be supported by the French, who have so advised Madrid. The State Department has also been requested to make a protest.'

**The Germans refuse Passports to the Dutch delegates.**—It proved somewhat difficult, however, to act on these instructions. The Spanish Minister in Brussels was no novice in the art of diplomatic obstruction. On March 22 the German Consul in Rotterdam received from the German authorities in Brussels a request 'not to issue passes to new Dutch delegates. The Spanish Minister still awaiting instructions from his government regarding their appointment.'

As soon as the Rotterdam office of the Commission learned of this message, they reported it to London and took up the question with M. Allize. He stated that the matter had been settled between the French and Spanish Governments, but that Villalobar's influence had caused the reversal of the attitude of the Spanish.

**The Dutch delegates receive Passports.**—In the meantime, however, diplomatic pressure had been brought to bear in Madrid, and on March 24 the German Consul in Rotterdam informed the Commission there that Villalobar had withdrawn his objections and that passports could be issued at once to the new Dutch delegates. The Rotterdam office at once arranged to send five of the men selected to Brussels, and on March 28 they were finally sent into Belgium.

**The State Department orders the Withdrawal of the Americans.**—The solution of this diplomatic problem did not clear up the difficulties faced by the Commission. On the contrary, it now became necessary to arrange the immediate replacement of all American representatives of the Commission in the occupied territories. On March 23 the State Department, in view of the increasing tension in the relations with Germany, decided to order the immediate withdrawal of the Minister and the Commission's staff from Belgium.

This move was no surprise to the men in Belgium. The sinking of several American ships in the middle of March seemed to them to force President Wilson's hand and to make a declaration of war imminent. Such a declaration would necessarily put an end to the activity of Americans in Belgium, and would require the working out of a new control over the relief. It is interesting to observe that at this time there was no thought of the relief being stopped by America's entrance into the war. Previous negotiations had demonstrated the desire of all the belligerents that the relief work should go on.

**The German attitude toward the Relief.**—On March 18 the Wolff Bureau had sent out a semi-official statement that the relief work would go on as before with the full permission and protection of the German Government. All reports to the effect that the provisioning of the occupied territories was endangered by the breaking off of the diplomatic relations between Germany and the United States, or by measures taken by the Germans to restrict the activities of the American representatives of the Commission, were declared incorrect. 'The German Government has officially informed the neutral governments that, now as before, it will support in every possible way the charitable work of the Commission. . . . In contradiction to Reuter's insinuation, the German Government, immediately after the breaking off of diplomatic relations, proposed to the Americans of the Relief Commission that they should continue to carry on the work of provisioning Belgium and Northern France. As a consequence these Americans have not had a moment's interruption of their activities.

'It appears therefore that the ravitaillement of the population of the occupied territories in the west is also ensured for the future if England does not hinder the supply of foodstuffs destined for that population.'

**The State Department's dispatch of March 23.**—The State Department had assured Hoover that the Commission would receive ample warning of any grave step to be taken by the United States Government. A few days after the President summoned Congress into special session for the scarcely disguised purpose of declaring war on Germany, the Commission was officially ordered by the State Department to withdraw its American members from Belgium. In a circular dispatch of March 23 the State Department informed the American Embassy in London that the Minister had been instructed to withdraw from Brussels with all diplomatic and consular officers and to arrange for the departure of the American members of the Commission. The State Department cabled also that the American Government and the Commission 'felt a heavy moral responsibility for the millions of innocent civilians behind the German lines, and it was decided that the work of the Commission should be kept going despite all difficulties until continued American participation became impossible. With the single purpose of serving the civil population, the Minister and the Commission have submitted to all the restrictions imposed upon them by the German authorities and the work has been maintained.

'In the course of the past ten days several of the Commission's ships have been attacked by German submarines without warning and in flagrant violation of the solemn engagements of the German Government. Protests addressed by this government to Berlin have not been answered. In these circumstances it is felt that the American staff of the Commission can no longer serve with advantage in Belgium, and that other neutrals might in the present situation be better able to handle the work.

'This government has approved the proposal of the government of the Netherlands to send into Belgium a certain number of subjects of the Netherlands to carry on the work so far performed by the American staff.'

**Instructions from the New York office.**—The State Department had informed the New York office of the Commission on March 23 of the contents of the message just quoted. Director Honnold at once cabled the news to London, stating that the Commission had assured the State Department of the willingness of the American members of the Commission to remain in Belgium, but that the State Department was of the opinion that no American should remain. The London office therefore should arrange for the withdrawal from Belgium and the selection of Dutch delegates to serve as members of the Commission's organisation until a new arrangement was completed. The London office replied on March 24 that they were in accord with the recommendations of the New York office and would keep Hoover informed of all steps taken.

**A day of Diplomatic Conferences in London, March 24.** As soon as the dispatch was received from New York announcing the decision of the State Department to withdraw all Americans from Belgium, Dr. Kellogg and Mr. Poland took up with the allied governments the question of the replacement of the Americans. In view of the desire of the Spanish to have a share in the work, it would obviously be impossible to go ahead and select Dutch delegates for Belgium as well as for France without seriously offending the Marquis de Villalobar and his government. Lord Eustace Percy, when called on, agreed with Dr. Kellogg that it would be best to insist on having only Dutch delegates in Northern France, but to appoint a number of Spanish delegates in Belgium. Dr. Page, the American

Ambassador, concurred in this view. The French Embassy strongly insisted on having exclusively Dutch delegates in Northern France, and at first desired Dutch delegates in Belgium also. But, after discussion of the problems involved, they agreed that it would be best to accept Spanish delegates in Belgium. It was decided to take no further action however until the embassy had received replies to dispatches previously sent to Madrid by the French Government insisting that the Marquis de Villalobar should not interfere with the appointment of delegates to succeed the Americans. The Belgian Minister, on having the situation explained to him, took the same position as that already agreed to by the representatives of the other allied governments.

**Instructions to Rotterdam.**—As the views of the various interested parties seemed to be in agreement, the Rotterdam office was informed by cable of the decision of the State Department. The Commission would withdraw all Americans from France and Belgium, replacing them by Dutch or Spanish delegates representing the Commission. On the evening of the same day (March 24) two dispatches were received in London from the Rotterdam office. The first reported that passports had been granted for the Dutch delegates to replace the Americans in Northern France; the second asked instructions with regard to Gray's remaining in Belgium to direct the Commission's work and the new delegates until another organisation was formed. On the following day another dispatch was received from Rotterdam, reporting that the messages of the London office had been sent to Brussels and asking again for instructions. 'Does order mean that all Americans leave at once or can a few stay to get Dutch started? What is Gray's position? What arrangements are you making for future Brussels executive control? We need information and instructions in fullest detail.'

**A week of Great Activity.**—In the last week of March many cables were sent daily between the various Commission offices in the endeavour to get a plan of action adopted without delay. On March 26, Rotterdam cabled London that five of the Dutch delegates would enter Belgium on the following day and that eight other men were available. The London office at the same time urged the necessity of expediting the selection of new men. The London office cabled New York asking that some of the Americans be permitted to remain until the Dutch were familiar with the work. A variety of messages dealt with the question of the direction of the work inside Belgium. London informed Rotterdam on March 25 that it was not yet determined whether the director should be Dutch. Rotterdam replied, on March 26, suggesting Mr. Fernand Baetens, the sole Belgian member of the Commission, for director. London, in reply to Rotterdam's query, cabled on March 26 that all operations should be carried on as before except for the substitution of other neutrals for Americans, that no day was set for the departure of the Americans, and that the understanding was that Gray would leave with the others.

**The Brussels Office.**—Meanwhile, inside Belgium the State Department's cable had finally put an end to the long period of uncertainty. The Americans immediately began to make preparations for their withdrawal and for the continuation of their work until a new neutral committee of control should be formed. Mr. Gregory, while in Rotterdam on a flying trip on March 28, reported on developments inside Belgium. He said the message instructing the withdrawal had been received and transmitted to the Germans, that application would at once be made for passports for all delegates to leave by April 5, that an effort would be made to have the time spent in Brussels counted as the whole or part of the 'quarantine' period, and that Gray should be left behind as with

the auditors for at least two weeks, to close up the books. The Germans were willing to give him a safe conduct in strongest possible terms signed by the Foreign Minister Zimmermann himself. Gregory said he felt no anxiety as to the treatment of the Americans, as the German authorities had been very courteous and very complimentary to the Americans in speaking of the work of the Commission. Gregory arranged with the Rotterdam office to send nine more Dutch delegates into Belgium, making thus, with the five Spanish and six Dutch already in Belgium, twenty delegates to take up the work. The first seven Americans to leave would start from Brussels on the evening of the 29.

**Arrangements for the Withdrawal.**—On March 28 the London office received a message from New York stating that the State Department desired all Americans to leave at once. This message was immediately sent on to Brussels as an answer to Gregory's message. The arrangements for departure were therefore expedited and it was decided to leave on April 2 instead of April 5. The German authorities arranged to secure a special train for the Legation staff and for the members of the Commission. The Secretary of the Spanish Legation and representatives of the Governor-General and of the general staff were to accompany this train to Switzerland as a safeguard against any possible annoyance.

**Hoover arrives in Paris.**—Hoover had in the meantime landed in Spain and hastened to Paris, where he arrived on March 28. He stopped at Madrid *en route* and had an audience with the Spanish Foreign Minister, to whom he explained the Commission's position and the reason for desiring only Dutch delegates in France. In a message to London on March 28, Hoover suggested that there should be a Dutch director in Belgium who should select his own staff, to include Spaniards as well as Dutch. He thought the new neutral committee should be a branch of the Commission for Relief in Belgium working with it in the same way as the Comité National and the Comité Français and having as its special mission the supervision of the guarantees. This message was at once sent on to Rotterdam to guide that office and the one of Brussels.

Further complications arose over the reorganisation of the relief work on March 26 and again on March 28 with the Spanish representatives in London. These, however, will be discussed in the next chapter.

**Gregory's Farewell Address to the C.N.**—Mr. Gregory returned to Brussels on the evening of March 28, taking with him five of the Dutch delegates. On the following day, Thursday the 29, he wrote to the Comité National a note announcing the departure of the Americans, which he read at the meeting of the committee. In the name of the American members of the Commission he expressed the deep regret they felt at being obliged to leave in response to instructions from Washington, and expressed to the Comité National the grateful acknowledgment of the American delegates for the many acts of kindness they had received in the two and a-half years of mutual co-operation. He assured the Comité National that the work would go on. 'Although we withdraw from the Commission, our places will be filled by others, who will, we hope, merit your appreciation. It will be welcome information to you, we trust, that our chairman, Mr. Hoover, and his associates will continue to carry on the work of the Commission outside Belgium in such a manner as will enable the supplies from overseas to continue to come to Rotterdam.

'If we have been of some slight service to you and to the Belgian people, the knowledge of that fact will be for us a sufficient reward and will be ever held by us in grateful remembrance. We do not say "Good-bye," but "Au revoir."'

**Francqui's Reply on behalf of the C.N.**—In reply, M. Francqui read a letter from the Comité National to Mr. Gregory, expressing the deep regret of Belgium at the departure of the Americans. 'For the more than two years that we have laboured in common to serve our country, you have laboured with all the warmth of your devotion to help a country that is not yours, but which your sentiments of human fellowship and respect for the right has made you love.

'The sadness we feel at the temporary separation . . . is nevertheless tempered by the joy we feel in learning that, in spite of your departure, you and your fellow-workers will continue on the outside to lavish on us your labour and devotion, under the skilful and wise management of Mr. Hoover. . . . As you leave us you and your fellow-workers may take with you the assurance that Belgians will never forget the great work that has been realised through you. Each day the bread they eat, the food they enjoy, will recall them to the colossal work still carried beyond our frontiers by our American friends, a work on which the feeding and existence of the country absolutely depend.

'In the history of mankind there is no example of a generosity so noble, and the sorrowful history of Belgium will show that your action has resulted in helping us, not only to live, but also to preserve our faith in the greatness of humanity and in the possible beauty of the future.'

**The first party leaves Brussels.**—That evening, March 29, the first party of seven delegates, Kittredge, Maverick, Leach, Potter, Maurice, Percy and Fletcher left Brussels accompanied by Ober-Leutnant Lüdert, one of the German 'Verpflegungs' officers, for Switzerland, via Cologne, Mayence and Singen. A day before their departure they had been informed that in view of the time they had spent in Brussels, no quarantine period at Baden-Baden would be required. The farewell dinner of the party and the scene of their departure will probably remain long in memory of those who took part. They were the first of the Americans definitively to leave Belgium. The others were to follow in a few days, but the departure of the first group marked the beginning of the end. The nature of the party that assembled to bid them farewell illustrates something of the character of the Commission. There were a number of the officers who had worked with the departing delegates in France, many of the other American delegates, of the new Spanish and Dutch delegates and many Belgian friends.

**Arrangements to continue the work after the withdrawal.** In the lack of definite instructions from the outside as to the way in which the work should be reorganised, Gregory had to act on his own responsibility. In a memorandum dated April 1, he set forth succinctly the steps taken before his departure for the continuance of the Commission's work inside Belgium. Gray would remain behind as director, with the three American accountants, under protection of special safe-conducts, for perhaps a month. All the delegates save those who had been in the Belgian etapes, Wickes and Stone at Namur, Pate at Mons, Carstairs at Charleroi, Dangerfield and Van Hee at Ghent, were to leave on the Minister's special train on April 2. The men named were to come to Brussels for their quarantine period of three or four weeks before they would be permitted to leave. There they would assist in the work of the Brussels office.

**Special Safe-conducts for Gray.**—The Spanish Minister had obtained the necessary guarantees and safe-conducts for the men who were to remain in Belgium, particularly for Prentiss Gray, Mrs. Gray, their child and nurse. The Vermittlungsstelle informed Mr. Gregory that the matter had been taken up with the higher civil and military authorities

and that they were all anxious to have the ravitaillement continue and to have an American remain in Brussels to direct the work.

**The assignment of the new Delegates.** In the memorandum Mr. Gregory also reported on the assignment of the new neutral delegates. He had agreed to send three Dutch and three Spanish to Northern France, two Spanish to Ghent and the other Dutchmen to Belgium. Because of the objection of the French Government to divided responsibility for the work in Northern France, and of the desire of German headquarters to have Dutch delegates in Flanders in connection with the general German-Flemish policy, this assignment was, however, never made effective. At first the Spanish Minister had declared he would retire from patronage of the relief unless at least three of the delegates in Northern France were Spanish, and for this reason Mr. Gregory had yielded the point and assigned three of the Spanish provisionally to Northern France. He added, however, that the Spanish would not be sent into Northern France until instructions were received from London. These instructions never came and other arrangements were made.

On April 2 the Rotterdam office cabled on to London a message from Brussels giving the information contained in the memoranda of Mr. Gregory referred to above, and informed London that they were taking no action with regard to the reorganisation until further instructions. This was in reply to a message from London announcing the arrival of Hoover with a new plan for settling the controversy over delegates and the control in Belgium.

**The Minister's train leaves Brussels.** On the evening of April 2 the special train carrying the American Legation and the majority of the American members of the Commission left the Gare du Nord at Brussels for Switzerland. Some ten of the Americans of the Commission remained behind, but to the people of Brussels, it represented the final severance of the entente with the Americans of the Commission for Relief in Belgium that had lasted so long. Hundreds of the personal friends of the departing delegates thronged the station for a last farewell. Many thousands of the population gathered to pay their tribute to the departing guests who had laboured so long for them. There was hardly a dry eye in the station as the train left. Every street crossing for some distance out was crowded with other groups of the people also desirous of getting a last glimpse of the Americans. The Americans were moved no less deeply than the Belgians. Many of the delegates—men like Curtis and Sperry who had been with the Commission since 1914—had formed warm and deep friendships among the Belgian circles in which they moved.

Such was the withdrawal of the Americans from Belgium. With the departure of Mr. Gregory and the greater part of the American members of the Commission on April 2, the work of Americans inside Belgium practically came to a close. For a month longer, however, Prentiss Gray remained to direct the Brussels office, and with him were the etappen delegates and the three American auditors. They carried on the work of familiarising the new delegates with their tasks and of closing the Commission's accounts in Belgium. In the meantime the Spanish-Dutch Committee for the Protection of the Relief was organised and the new regime in the occupied territories established. The work of the Commission outside Belgium went on as before—though the shipping conditions resulting from the new German submarine war resulted in a practical cessation for two months of arrivals at Rotterdam.

**The final parting.**—In the first week of May, the new neutral committee was ready to begin its work. Gray then left Brussels with the last remaining delegates who had been

with him for a month in Brussels—Wickes, Stone, Pate, Carstairs with his wife, child and nurse, and Dangerfield, together with the wife, child and nurse of Gray made up the last party for Switzerland. They were accompanied by an officer from the General Government and reached Berne without difficulty. Van Hee, Neville, De Gruchy and St. Amour went out to Holland to continue work there; Van Hee in the Consular Service, the three accountants in the Rotterdam office of the Commission. The three members of the Commission who were not American still remained at Brussels, Fernand Baetens as the chief representative of the Commission under the new regime, Rene Jensen as secretary to the office at Brussels and M. Armand Dulait of the Automobile Service. They continued throughout 1917-18 to look after the interests of the Commission for Relief in Belgium at Brussels.

So came to an end the American occupation of Belgium. The romance and uniqueness of the experiences of the delegates cannot be adequately portrayed here. In the history of the world no group of men had probably ever held a similar position. They had served the people of Belgium loyally and well and had succeeded in mitigating the harshness of the German regime. Now that they were no longer neutral they turned their work over to the new delegates of Dutch and Spanish nationality and withdrew with the consciousness of having lived up to their obligations—and with the knowledge that though they had left the scene of their endeavours, their work would be continued, and that the American participation in the relief would still go on outside Belgium. Some of the delegates went into the London, Rotterdam and New York offices and thus remained in the service of the Commission. These offices continued throughout 1917 and 1918 to keep the stream of supplies flowing into Belgium in the face of ever-increasing difficulties.



## CHAPTER XVII

FORMATION OF THE SPANISH-DUTCH COMMITTEE FOR  
THE PROTECTION OF RELIEF

## NEGOTIATION FOR THE SELECTION OF NEUTRAL DELEGATES

The C.R.B. in Belgium, April 1917.—The work of relief in Belgium and Northern France continued under the direction of Americans and was carried on directly by the Commission for Relief in Belgium for a month after the departure of the American Minister and the majority of the American delegates. Gray and his loyal band had remained behind to administer the relief until such time as a new committee was ready to assume in the occupied territories the responsibility for safeguarding the guarantees which the Commission was no longer in a position to supervise through the agency of American representatives. During the month of April the various interested parties reached an agreement and a joint Spanish-Dutch committee was formed to take over that part of the work of the Brussels office which related to the supervision of the guarantees and protection for the imported and native supplies of food.

The problem of forming a new Committee.—There were, however, many diplomatic difficulties to be overcome before any such neutral organisation could be formed to take over the work of the Brussels office. The desires of the allied governments had to be complied with, and the susceptibilities of the various interested diplomats and neutral governments had to be handled with delicacy. The decision of the Commission to continue its work as far as the Belgian frontier had eliminated one great problem, that of the continuance of the service of food purchase and transport. There still remained the problem of finding a body, in which the allied governments could have complete confidence, to control distribution.

The Americans had enjoyed such a confidence. The allied governments knew that Mr. Hoover and his representatives in Belgium could be fully trusted. The young Americans, on whom the responsibility for the supervision of distribution had fallen, were a carefully picked lot, representative of the best type of American manhood. Alert and energetic, tactful yet firm, they possessed the practical sense, the singleness of purpose and the personality that made it possible for them to deal with the Germans, the Belgians and the French on an equal footing and to win the confidence and esteem of all. Their common loyalty to their leader and to the work, their fellowship in the 'C.R.B.,' gave to their work the close-knit unity that was indispensable. It was therefore not easy to replace them by other neutrals.

The selection of neutral Delegates.—If representatives of different neutral countries should be chosen, unity of aim and purpose might be impossible in the new regime. Differences of tradition, habits and objects might lead to friction and inefficiency. If only

one neutral country should be represented, it would be difficult to obtain sufficient diplomatic backing to give any authority to the new committee. Further, as the Marquis de Villalobar once remarked to the American Minister, it would be very difficult in the neutral countries of Europe to find men with the necessary qualifications. Americans, said the Marquis, are at once men of culture, diplomats and business men. They can mix in any society readily, possess tact and discretion, yet are practical and efficient. In Europe one can hardly find this combination. The gentlemen are seldom business men; the business men are seldom diplomats and lack culture and the social qualities; the cultured are seldom practical.

There was therefore a double problem, that of the constitution of a neutral committee, and the selection of representatives of this committee to adequately replace the American representatives of the Commission. This problem involved delicate diplomatic issues. Both the Dutch and Spanish desired to share in as large a measure as possible the credit for the continuation of the relief work. Other neutral countries in Europe were not unwilling to participate and offered their services. The elimination of the Americans brought up the question of who should in future control the supervision of distribution. Both the Dutch and Spanish Governments desired to take the leadership in the new organisation. This inevitably led to diplomatic difficulties.

**Diplomatic difficulties in the choice of Delegates.**—These first appeared in connection with the question of choosing delegates of other neutral countries to temporarily replace such Americans as were withdrawn. These delegates were to serve under the Commission, and it had been decided at the beginning of March that they should be of Dutch nationality. The Spanish Minister, as has already been pointed out, did not agree to this and at once introduced to the Commission in Brussels a number of Spanish delegates. He insisted that at least half of the new delegates in France and in Belgium alike should be Spanish. The Marquis de Villalobar had rendered great service to the relief work. A diplomat of long experience and unquestioned ability, he possessed a great influence with the German authorities, which he had used to good advantage at various crises in the history of the relief by obtaining concessions from the General Government. The Commission therefore hesitated to take any action that would lead him to act on his threat of withdrawing from the patronage of the relief if his wishes were disregarded.

When Mr. Gregory received the order to leave Belgium with the American delegates, he was faced by this serious dilemma. If he carried out orders and selected Dutch delegates to replace the Americans, the indispensable support of the Spanish Minister might be lost. He had no authority to accede to the demands of the Marquis, as the allied governments had expressly insisted that the new delegates should be of Dutch nationality. He finally escaped the dilemma by provisionally assigning three of the Spanish to Northern France, but with the condition that this was not to become effective until confirmed from London. Meanwhile, Gray and other American members of the Commission would remain at Brussels to direct the relief until the diplomatic issues were settled between the governments. The Spanish Minister and the German authorities welcomed this action and were much relieved at the postponement of a possible crisis. The diplomatic decision was then referred to the allied governments.

**Negotiations with the Allied Governments.**—Mr. Poland and Dr. Kellogg, of the London office, had been informed of the diplomatic tangle in Brussels early in March and were kept in touch with all developments there, and they had laid the matter before

the French, British and Belgian Governments. Then began a long period of diplomatic discussions between Paris, London, Madrid, Le Havre and Washington. The American and French Governments favoured replacing the delegates with Dutch, at least until a declaration of war between the United States and Germany. The Foreign Office took the position that in view of the diplomatic situation, Spanish as well as Dutch delegates might be used. There were clearly two questions involved; the nationality of the delegates to be chosen to replace Americans until such time as the Brussels office of the Commission was withdrawn, and the constitution of a new committee ultimately to replace that office. These questions were dealt with at length in a message of March 22, from the British Foreign Office to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

**The Foreign Office message of March 22.**—In this message it was stated that continuance of the Commission's work 'has been made possible by the fact that its establishment has fulfilled two requirements. These are: first, a thoroughly efficient business organisation for the purchase, transport and distribution of supplies; secondly, the presence in the occupied territories of thoroughly reliable delegates in free and constant communication with the head office of the Commission and in a position to report fully as to the machinery of distribution and on the action and attitude of the German authorities. Any future organisation established to take over any part of the functions of the American Commission must fulfil these two requirements.' The Foreign Office continued that they desired that the organisation of purchase and transport should remain in the hands of the Commission. When the United States entered the war a new organisation would be required to exercise personal control over conditions in the occupied territory and to act as a link between the Commission and the French and Belgian committees. 'His Majesty's Government believe that this function can best be discharged by a Dutch organisation.' 'This could either be an independent body responsible to the allied governments, or a subsidiary organisation acting purely as the agents of the American managers of the Commission for Relief in Belgium. If the Americans were willing to accept the responsibility, the latter alternative was preferable; if not, the new committee would have to be independent and responsible directly to the allied governments. In any event, it would be necessary to have a capable man, preferably of Dutch nationality, as director in Brussels to carry on diplomatic business that 'cannot be adequately discharged by the Spanish Minister and the Dutch Charge d'Affairs at Brussels. . . . In the past it has been Mr. Hoover's ability and energy which have enabled the allied governments' to secure guarantees from the Germans which could never have been obtained by the ordinary methods of neutral diplomacy.'

'It must obviously be left to Mr. Hoover to select a man for this position with whom he feels that he can co-operate and on whose activity he can rely.'

'In general, it is desirable that the American managers of the Commission should keep in their own hands, so far as possible, the appointment of all delegates in the occupied territory, and of all persons in Holland who are to form the nucleus of any neutral organisation which may be set up there. The diplomatic patrons of the Commission must not interfere with this function, but must confine themselves to matters of negotiation between the governments.'

In the concluding paragraph of the message the Foreign Office stated that it was necessary to associate more than one neutral government with the work in order to obtain the necessary diplomatic support, but that it was essential that as far as possible 'the

actual administrative personnel of the relief work in the occupied territories should be of one nationality.'

**Dutch Delegates for Northern France.**—The attitude set forth in this message was representative of the viewpoint of all the allied governments, and determined to a great extent their action. The diplomatic difficulties raised by the attitude of the Spanish Minister had however to be met. On March 22 the Rotterdam office cabled London that the Spanish Minister had stated that the objection to having exclusively Dutch delegates in Northern France was from the Germans as well as from the Spanish. The German Consul in Rotterdam, acting under instructions from Brussels, refused until March 24 to issue passports for the Dutch to enter Belgium. On March 23 the State Department's order to withdraw Americans reached London, and on the following day the London office reached the agreement with the Foreign Office and the representatives of the French and Belgian Governments that Dutch delegates should be sent to Northern France, and a number of Spanish as well as Dutch delegates to Belgium to replace immediately the Americans. The London office then cabled Rotterdam to expedite the selection of delegates to replace the Americans, and to canvass the situation thoroughly with a view to ascertaining the advisability of selecting a Dutch director for the Brussels office.

**The Spanish claims to Recognition.**—On March 26 Senor José Roura who had been selected by the Spanish Ambassador in London in February to take over the London office of the Commission for Relief in Belgium as director, called for the second time at 3, London Wall Buildings, to offer to undertake the work at once and to put himself at the disposal of the management if his services were required. Director Poland told him that the arrangement agreed upon provided for the continuation of the relief outside Belgium as before, that Dutch delegates were being selected to go to Northern France, and that it was not known whether the new Belgian representatives would be exclusively Dutch, or Dutch and Spanish. Poland thanked Senor Roura for his offer, and told him the Commission for Relief in Belgium would gladly call upon him if it were decided that Spanish were required for the work in Belgium.

On March 27 Mr. Gregory cabled from Rotterdam that the Marquis de Villalobar insisted on having three Spanish delegates sent to Northern France and that it was necessary to propitiate him. 'It is my feeling,' he said, 'that if the governments interested cannot agree on this matter of apparent insignificance, I must act on my best judgment and in the interests of the ravitaillement alone.' On returning to Brussels Mr. Gregory did so act and made the decision already mentioned.

**Hoover suggests the foundation of a new Committee.**—At this point in the tangle Hoover once more intervened. He had hurried up via Madrid to Paris and was soon in thorough touch with the whole situation. On March 28 he cabled from Paris making suggestions as to best means of organising the work. 'My idea,' he said, 'is that we must insist on a Dutch director for the neutral committee who will administer inside Belgium, and that he should select his own staff and should include Spaniards satisfactory to himself, no doubt chosen in accordance with Villalobar, and we should concentrate all our efforts in choice of chairman.' He went on to propose several candidates for the position of director in Brussels, and suggested that concessions should be made to the Spanish in order to satisfy them. The new committee should be regarded as a 'branch of the Commission for Relief in Belgium, the same as the Comité National and the Comité Français; the special province of the new neutral committee being the supervision of German guarantees,

assurance of equitable distribution and audit. The Dutch should conduct Northern France internal shipping, distribution and accounts, the Spanish being employed in Belgium in supervising German guarantees.' In another message of the same day Hoover insisted that the whole staff must be chosen by the Commission managers, as otherwise it would be impossible to carry on the work efficiently.

**The necessity of giving Spanish and Dutch equal representation.**—The London office, in replying to this message, informed Hoover of Gregory's dispatch from Rotterdam and of Villalobar's suggestion that the Spanish Government would decline patronage in Northern France if three Spanish delegates were not chosen. They also stated that the 'British and French insist strongly on exclusively Dutch delegates for France, but to avoid breach they may be willing to compromise by appointment of half and half. Both are willing to accept same compromise in Belgium, in which Belgian Government concurs, but all governments leave whole matter in Commission's hands. . . . Gregory and we feel that it is unfortunate, but that it is probably in the best interests of the ravitaillement that antagonism from Villalobar should be avoided.

**The Spanish Ambassador intervenes.**—On the same day, March 28, Mr. Poland, at the request of the Spanish Ambassador, called at the embassy in London where he met also Senor José Roura, whom Senor Merry del Val introduced as 'vice-chairman' of the Commission. The Spanish Ambassador stated that Spanish Government and in fact all Spaniards were much concerned as there was apparently an intention to slight the Spaniards and exclude them from any active participation in the management of the Commission. Mr. Poland informed them that no slight was intended, but that as the French were making efforts to secure a large amount of supplies from Holland they were very anxious to have an exclusively Dutch organisation for the north of France. The Commission was thoroughly in accord with this view, but held itself subject to the desires of the interested governments as to the personnel to be appointed. They felt it was desirable to have a Dutch director and a preponderance of Dutch delegates in Belgium also, in order to secure the best results. Poland stated that Mr. Hoover was arriving in a few days and that it would be better to leave the matter open for discussion with him.

Senor Merry del Val and Senor Roura stated that they were prepared to provide a director and an assistant director for Brussels. These two men were clerks in Senor Roura's establishment in London. Mr. Poland suggested that men with only clerical experience would hardly be of the type necessary for the difficult position at Brussels, but the Spanish Ambassador declared that their experience was along the lines of the Commission's work and that they were just the men needed. Further, he stated that the Spanish feeling was so strong in this matter that if they were excluded it was quite possible the Spanish Government would withdraw its patronage from the work, both in France and Belgium. There the matter was left until Hoover's arrival. He cabled from Paris on Friday, March 30, that he felt they would ultimately have to give in to Villalobar and the Spanish, but that they were making further efforts at Madrid. He thought it advisable to secure a Dutch director as quickly as possible. In conclusion, he said he would arrive in London on Sunday.

**The Dutch Government's plans.**—Meanwhile the Dutch Government took action that led to further complications. On March 29 the Foreign Minister in London had cabled Hoover asking that Dutch delegates and a Dutch director be appointed at once for Belgium. The same day Rotterdam office cabled London an account of the situation in Holland.

They said that the Dutch considered that they were officially taking over the relief in Belgium and had the right to make appointments themselves. A statement was published on March 27 to the effect that the Dutch and Spanish were the patrons of the relief, and in order to take control in Belgium were preparing a joint committee. The Dutch Government had asked a vice-president of the second chamber to be director at Brussels and he was preparing to take up his duties. The Rotterdam office had explained to the Dutch Foreign Minister that all appointments must be made by Hoover, that the Commission was still a private organisation and responsible to Hoover alone. The Foreign Minister then stated that a director had been selected by the Dutch Government and that he would go on March 31 to Brussels. Meanwhile he was selecting his own men as delegates.

The Rotterdam office also stated that the Spanish Minister had called and insisted that the Spanish Government must be consulted in any matter affecting the relief, and that the appointment of a Dutch director by the Dutch Government would not be permitted. The British Minister had confirmed the viewpoint of the Rotterdam office and had called on the Dutch Foreign Minister to prevent any precipitate action. The British Minister and the Rotterdam director of the Commission considered the man chosen for director unsuitable for the post because of his political tendencies. After interviews with him, he was persuaded not to go to Brussels but to wait for Hoover's nomination. The British Minister suggested that it might be advisable to appoint a Spanish director if a good man could be found. The Rotterdam message concluded: 'We see great and continuing trouble ahead unless the whole question can be satisfactorily settled, and refer therefore once more to our suggestion that when Gray leaves Baetens be appointed Director.'

The London office in reply cabled that action would be deferred on the solution of the problems relating to the reorganisation of the relief until Hoover's arrival on April 1.

#### HOOVER'S PROPOSALS FOR THE FORMATION OF A SPANISH-DUTCH COMMITTEE

**Gregory's report on the situation in Belgium.**—Just before leaving Brussels, Mr. Gregory sent out the long memorandum referred to in the previous chapter summing up the action he had taken. He had reported assigning three Spanish and three Dutch delegates to Northern France, two Dutch and two Spanish to Belgium. He said that every possible influence had been brought to bear on the Spanish Minister in order that Hoover's instructions that only Dutch delegates be sent to Northern France might be carried out. The Spanish Minister had replied that he would retire from the *ravitaillement* if this were done. Gregory continued: 'Van Vollenhoven (Dutch Chargé d'Affaires) agreed with the position of the Marquis because he does not want the Spaniards in Belgium. Under these circumstances, and considering the delicate situation in which we were then placed *vis-à-vis* the Germans, we concluded after considerable reflection that the only thing we could do under the circumstances was to appoint, at least temporarily, these three Spaniards. It is not without the range of possibility that these three delegates may not be agreeable to the German authorities. They will not be allowed to proceed to Northern France until we receive orders from London that the matter is settled. Another complication has arisen in the Flanders. Two Spaniards were assigned there at the suggestion

o Van Hee and the Provincial Committee, on account of the Flemish question; but two days ago there came a telegram from General Ludendorff saying that the Germans desired only Dutchmen appointed for the Flanders. This undoubtedly is also due to the Flemish question, but from the opposite point of view. Inasmuch as this is *etappen* territory, we cannot insist too strongly on this matter.'

**The choice of a successor to Gray.**— 'Concerning Gray's successor, the Spanish Minister is very pronounced in his opinion. He says that under no circumstances will he consent to a Dutchman. He was entirely satisfied that Gray should continue to act as director and so notified his government. On this subject, it appears to us hopeless to try and get Van Vollenhoven and the Spanish Minister to agree. The matter will have to be adjusted outside between all the interested governments. The German Government has expressed a very strong desire that an American or some neutral other than Dutch or Spanish act as director. They fear that great difficulties will arise between the Spanish and Dutch diplomatic representatives here, each striving for a majority of power in the affairs of the Commission, and that the actual work of feeding the people will suffer or absolutely fail as a consequence.

'We do not know the motives which have caused all this trouble, but it is possible that the Spanish Minister has taken this position of insisting that three Spaniards go to Northern France because he fears that otherwise the *ravitaillement* of Northern France may be separated from that of Belgium, the Dutch taking care of the former. Villalobar had frankly stated that he fears that with the Dutch controlling the *ravitaillement* in Northern France, they will endeavour through the French Minister at The Hague to increase the functions of the Comité Hollandais, in this territory, to the exclusion of the Commission for Relief in Belgium; that should a separation be brought about between the Belgian and French *ravitaillement* schemes, the Belgian Government, lacking the backing of the French Government at the British Foreign Office, might find themselves confronted with a reduction or elimination of the Belgian import program. The Comité National feels that there may be a danger of this and considers it well worth discussion.'

**Hoover proposes a New Solution.**— The substance of this report was cabled to London by the Rotterdam office on April 2, the day after Hoover's arrival in England. He had immediately taken a firm hold on the situation and was soon working on a definite plan to overcome the difficulties that had arisen. A message was therefore sent to Rotterdam instructing that no further steps should be taken toward 'explaining to Loudon and others plans for carrying on in Belgium, leaving matters of Dutch delegates in *statu quo*, as Hoover has modification of which you will be informed as soon as possible.'

Hoover's plan, as he outlined it in a message to M. Chevrillon in Paris on April 2, was to erect a 'new neutral committee with two chairmen in Brussels, one Dutch and one Spanish, the Dutch to predominate in direction of Northern France and Belgian *etappen*, the Spanish in the occupation zone; this organisation to maintain one director in Holland and one in London and to confine itself absolutely to protective measures, we and the Belgian and French Committees to carry out all administrative commercial matters as at present.' Hoover added that he thought this plan would serve as a 'desperation measure,' and that in view of the growing diplomatic difficulties with both Dutch and Spanish, an immediate solution was imperative.

**Hoover's memorandum to the Foreign Office.**— On April 3 Hoover submitted to Lord Eustace Percy a draft of a scheme for reorganisation inside Belgium along the

lines indicated above. He proposed the establishment of a 'Comité Neutre de Protection et Secours' under the high patronage of the King of Spain and the Queen of Holland, and with the immediate patronage of the Ambassadors and Ministers of Spain and Holland in Brussels, London and Paris and Berlin. The function of this committee would be 'the maintenance of all undertakings and guarantees given by the various belligerents.' This organisation should take over the department of inspection and control in Belgium, should make reports to the various governments on the observance of the guarantees, and should maintain communications in Belgium and between the various committees. This committee would have a Dutch chairman for Northern France and the Belgian *etappen* districts and a Spanish chairman for the district of the General Government.

There should be a Dutch director in Holland and a Spanish director in England to look after protective measures. The staff of representatives throughout Belgium and Northern France should be of both nationalities, chosen by the directors, and working on a salaried basis.

**Co-operation of the New Committee with the C.R.B., C.N., and the C.F.**—Hoover outlined the manner in which this new organisation would co-operate with the Commission for Relief in Belgium, the Comité National and the Comité Français in a cablegram sent to Rotterdam on April 4. He thought that the Commission for Relief in Belgium should continue its work of purchasing and shipping food. The supplies could be turned over to the Comité National and the Comité Français at the terminals. Baetens should act as representative of the Commission for Relief in Belgium, co-operating with the Comité National in the handling of shipping, making up of accounts, etc. The new neutral committee would carry on the work of the Bureau of Inspection and Control, would carry on all negotiations with the Germans either directly or through the Minister patrons, and would assist the local committees, but would have no jurisdiction over the commercial or financial operations of the *ravitaillement* nor over the actual distribution. The whole of the work of administration in purchase, shipping and distribution matters would continue to rest in the hands of the Commission for Relief in Belgium, the Comité National and the Comité Français, while the new neutral committee would take over the handling of all protective measures and the supervision of all guarantees.

**Balfour's letter of April 6.**—The Foreign Office at once approved the plan suggested by Hoover and outlined above. No time was lost in taking steps to secure the formation of the neutral protective committee and the solution of the diplomatic problems involved. In a letter of April 6 to the Spanish Ambassador in London, the Right Hon. A. J. Balfour, who had succeeded Viscount Grey as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in December, proposed the reorganisation of the relief work in the manner suggested by Mr. Hoover. The points made in this letter were: first, that the financial, commercial and shipping arrangements should be left in the hands of the American direction of the Commission; second, that the French and Belgian committees should handle all shipping, accounting and distribution questions in the occupied territories in co-operation with an office of the Commission at Brussels directed by a staff to be chosen by the Commission; third, that a neutral committee should be organised under the joint patronage of the King of Spain and the Queen of Holland to enforce the guarantees, maintain communications, make reports and carry on any necessary negotiations with the Germans. This committee would have a Dutch chairman for the north of France and the Belgian *etappen* regions, a Spanish chairman for the district of the General Government. There would be a



Dutch director in Holland and a Spanish director in England to attend to protective measures.

The staff should be composed of both Spanish and Dutch delegates. 'As the managers of the Commission for Relief in Belgium have in the past set up the standard in their Belgian staff of having no man of mercantile training or affiliation and have chosen their entire staff from men from university, professional or public service categories with a view to avoiding any possible questions of self-interest, it would seem desirable that the same type of men should be chosen by the chairmen of the new committee.'

Mr. Balfour stated that he felt that these proposals 'form the simplest solution of the problems involved in the appointment of new delegates, more especially as under these proposals the neutral governments and representatives will be relieved of the very financial responsibilities entailed by the expenditure of the very large sums of money advanced by the allied governments. These responsibilities will continue to be borne by the old organisation of the Commission for Relief in Belgium.'

**The Proposals are Favourably Received.**—Simultaneously with this letter, dispatches were sent to The Hague outlining the proposals for discussion with the Dutch Government and the Marquis de Villalobar. The French and Belgian governments were also informed of the proposals and their approval was asked.

The proposals were received favourably in all quarters. The situation had been becoming very involved and the plan suggested made possible an arrangement acceptable to all the interested parties.

On April 7 the Rotterdam office, replying to Hoover's cable of April 4, stated that Villalobar approved the plan in principle but desired the sanction of his government. He was very anxious that Gray should remain, and thought it would be better to have the two new neutral directors working together over the whole ravitaillement rather than over separate districts. In another dispatch of April 9, the Rotterdam office reported that the Dutch Foreign Minister Loudon was very pleased with the proposals and would do his utmost to assist carrying them out along the lines suggested by Hoover. He thought it would be better to have the separate chairmen for the special districts, and was desirous of sending in the Dutch director as soon as possible.

Hoover cabled in reply that if the Dutch agreed to the proposals, Loudon should be asked to select a Dutch chairman and to send him at once to Brussels. Gray should be directed to leave as soon as a neutral chairman was installed in Belgium.

**The French Government's Reply.**—Meanwhile the French Ambassador in London had cabled his government, strongly insisting upon acceptance without essential modifications of the proposals included in Hoover's memorandum and in Balfour's letter to the Spanish Ambassador. On April 13 the French Ambassador informed the Commission that the plan as a whole had been approved by his government. The only modification suggested related to the title of the new committee and to the work of the two chairmen. The government thought the committee should not be called a 'Comité pour la Protection du Secours,'\* but should rather be known as the 'Comité Neutre pour la Protection du Ravitaillement des Pays Envahis.'† It also seemed preferable to the French Government that the two chairmen should work together rather than over separate districts. It was of great importance, too, that the relation of the committee to the Commission for Relief

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\* Committee for the Protection of Relief.

† Neutral Committee for the Protection of the Provisionment of the Invaded Districts.

in Belgium should be clearly specified to avoid any future misunderstanding. M. Cambon therefore suggested that the Commission for Relief in Belgium, in agreement with the French and Belgian representatives, should draft a formal memorandum on the reorganisation of the relief that should be presented to the Foreign Office. If approved, it would become the formal basis for the relief work in future.

**Hoover urges the Dutch Government to act.**—On April 14, Hoover cabled Rotterdam that the Spanish were asking Madrid to select immediately a distinguished man to go to Brussels as chairman under the new plan. He asked what action the Dutch had taken and emphasised the importance of getting a suitable man at once. The Rotterdam office replied on April 17 that difficulty had arisen as the first chairman proposed was not acceptable either to the Germans or to the allied Ministers at The Hague. Director Brown of the Rotterdam office then proposed that another appointment be made. The British Minister supported him in this and the Dutch Foreign Minister ultimately agreed.

**Hoover's letter of April 17 to the Spanish Ambassador.**—Hoover wrote to the Spanish Ambassador, Merry del Val, on April 17, urging the immediate formation of the neutral committee. He pointed out that much time had passed 'since the protection of the relief inside Belgium was handed over to the Spanish and Dutch Governments and as yet no organisation has been initiated by these two governments.' Hoover was 'filled with anxiety for the safety of the whole enterprise. The lack of restraint in Belgium has already resulted in the abstraction of vast quantities of cattle and in other disturbing features which fill us with utmost anxiety. . . . The delay in the appointment of a proper staff seriously jeopardises the whole work. . . . You will realise that we of the Commission are now entirely helpless in the matter of administration in Belgium, and that the whole responsibility to the Belgian people of continuance of these supplies must rest on the Spanish and Dutch Governments for we will not fail in delivering them to the frontier.'

**Hoover's cable to the Marquis de Villalobar.**—Two days later Hoover sent a cable to the Marquis de Villalobar again urging the importance of immediate action in getting a staff of the proposed neutral committee at work. He suggested that the Spanish and Dutch chairmen should be appointed and sent to Brussels at the earliest possible moment, and pointed out the advisability of having separate districts for the administration of the relief, with a Spanish chairman for the General Government district and a Dutch chairman for Northern France and the Belgian etapes. There was no reason why the relief work should not go on, especially in view of the probable financial aid from the American Government. But it would be impossible for Hoover to get continued support unless he could point 'to a sound and solid organisation replacing the Commission for Relief in Belgium inside Belgium. It seems to me that you, knowing the whole background of this work, are the only person who can solve the difficulties in the present emergency, and that all negotiations with various parties outside your leadership are practically wasted owing to the entire lack of understanding of the difficulties and requirements.'

## THE FORMATION AND FUNCTIONS OF THE NEW COMMITTEE

**The Spanish Government accepts Hoover's plan.**—The uncertainty concerning the action the Spanish Government would take on the proposals for the new committee was dissipated on April 19, when His Excellency Senor Don Merry del Val transmitted to Hoover a copy of a letter he had addressed to Lord Robert Cecil at the Foreign Office stating that the Spanish Government had accepted all but one of the proposals contained in Balfour's letter of April 6. The Spanish for practical reasons wished to be free to select a staff from among men of mercantile training and affiliation, as 'the Spanish subjects available for the work are, not exclusively, but in their majority, men up to the present engaged in commercial enterprises. This circumstance, nevertheless, in no way impairs the high opinion these gentlemen deserve and, on the contrary, qualifies them very especially in the matter of language and knowledge of the different continental countries.'

**The Belgian Government approves.**—The Belgian Minister, M. Hymans, wrote Hoover on April 20, informing him that all the proposals in the letter of April 6 had been approved by the Belgian Government. They felt, however, that it would be preferable to have the two chairmen work together in all matters instead of directing separate districts. If the idea of joint responsibility did not seem practical, M. Hymans suggested that the chairmen should act together at least in all questions concerning the guarantees in force in the occupied territories.

With another communication of the same date, M. Hymans transmitted copies of dispatches sent by the Belgian Government to their representatives at The Hague and Madrid, instructing them to ask officially the Queen of Holland and the King of Spain to appoint delegates to work in the occupied territories. The messages stated that 'this official nomination would doubtless protect these officials against refusal of acceptance by the German authorities.' The Dutch Government had on April 19 requested that Gray be permitted to remain indefinitely as director, but Hoover and the American Government had emphatically objected and insisted that Gray should not remain later than May 1. In view of this the Belgian Government instructed their Minister at The Hague to request a prompt reply from the Dutch Government. Brand Whitlock, who had arrived at Le Havre on April 19, had agreed to urge the American Government to keep Gray in Belgium, but it seemed unlikely that this would be done. The Belgian Minister at Madrid was to suggest that the Spanish designate consular agents to represent them in Belgium.

**An inquiry from the French Government.**—On April 20, also, Hoover received a letter from the French Ambassador requesting information as to the steps that had been taken toward the reorganisation of the relief. The French Government were somewhat worried, as they had been informed that there was still controversy as to the appointment of Spanish and Dutch directors and that the ravitaillement of the North of France was being neglected. The French Government wished especially to know: (1) how the reorganisation was proceeding; (2) the advisability of appointing a French agent to work with the Commission for Relief in Belgium in Holland for the interests of the North of France; (3) what purchases were being made in Holland for Belgium and for Northern France?

Mr. Poland replied immediately to this request. He informed M. Roger Cambon, who was conducting the relief negotiations for the French, that the Spanish and Belgian Governments had approved the reorganisation proposal, that the Commission had no

objection to the appointment of a French representative at Rotterdam, and that every effort was being made to get the new organisation in Belgium to functioning at the earliest possible moment.

**Hoover objects to leaving Gray at Brussels.**—On April 21, Hoover cabled the Commission office in New York urging that Whitlock's request that Gray be permitted to remain in Brussels as director of the Commission should be disapproved. Hoover said that he was convinced that Gray 'is neither safe in Belgium, nor can he bind Germany in agreement, and beyond all, it seems to me entirely improper for an American to live in Brussels in constant communication and negotiations with the Germans, and very undesirable to leave so valuable a hostage in their hands, despite any guarantees they may give for his safety. Our freedom to denounce transgression of guarantees is entirely limited by our fear for his safety. I therefore sincerely hope you will not countenance any recommendation of this sort, and in this opinion I am strongly supported by both the British and French Governments.'

Hoover also sent a similar message to Whitlock, stating that Gray had been ordered to leave by May 1 and should not be kept in Belgium longer than that. As Hoover pointed out 'the only hope of saving the guarantees and the Commission is to put the entire responsibility equally on the shoulders of the Dutch and Spanish Governments.' In a reply on April 23, Whitlock stated that he deferred entirely to Hoover's wishes. He said he had made the suggestion that Gray should remain only because of the difficulties in getting the new committee started, and because of the embarrassment occasioned to the Belgian Government by the conflicting pressure that had been brought to bear.

**The Conference of April 21.**—These difficulties were removed, however, in the next few days. On April 21 a meeting was held in Rotterdam at which participated the Dutch Foreign Minister, the Marquis de Villalobar, Van Vollenhoven, Dutch Chargé d'Affaires at Brussels, Francqui, Gray and Brown. Gray and Francqui had been given passports by the Germans to visit Holland to assist in making arrangements for the work in the new committee. Hoover's message to Gray on April 21 instructing him to leave Belgium by May 1 had brought the situation to a crisis. Previously both the Dutch and the Spanish had been delaying action and urging that Gray should remain. Each group seems to have feared that the other would gain the ascendancy in the new committee and that great difficulty would be experienced in obtaining proper co-operation. At the meeting of April 21 it was decided, however, that Dutch and Spanish chairmen should be selected at once. The Dutch agreed to put in a member of the Dutch Legation at Brussels, M. Langenbergh, as chairman. He was in Brussels and could begin work immediately. Villalobar at the same time said he was requesting the Spanish Government to nominate one of the Spanish consuls in Holland as Spanish chairman at Brussels.

At the conclusion of the conference, Gray cabled Hoover that on his return to Brussels he would immediately apply for passports to leave Brussels in accordance with Hoover's instructions. He said the office affairs at Brussels would be completely straightened up before he left.

**Villalobar's reply to Hoover.**—Villalobar confirmed the agreement reached at the conference in a message of April 23 to Hoover. He said he was sorry Gray could not remain, but recognised the impossibility of this. He had wired Madrid to send a Spanish chairman at once. He was greatly pleased at Hoover's assurance of financial support from the American Government, and was convinced the new committee would be able to continue

and secure all existing guarantees from the German authorities. Directors had not previously been appointed by the neutral governments because of the 'desire to hold Gray at Brussels, as we considered that your own man was the most efficient person to continue the work. You may heartily count upon it that nothing can be accomplished without you, therefore I am sure you will never fail to maintain the relief of the unfortunate country of Belgium that feels so indebted to your genius, your activity, your constant attention and interest.'

**The formation of the Spanish-Dutch Committee.**—Once the Spanish and Dutch Governments had decided to take hold of the work, things moved very quickly. On April 25 the Spanish Ambassador in London informed the Commission for Relief in Belgium that the Spanish Government had selected Senor Don Pedro Saura, a Spanish consul, for the chairman at Brussels of the 'Spanish-Dutch Neutral Commission for Relief in Belgium and Northern France.' He would be assisted by Senor Buylla and other Spanish representatives. Senor Don José Roura would be the Spanish director of the neutral committee in London. On April 25 the Rotterdam office cabled that the Dutch Government had appointed Jonkheer A. Michiels van Verduynen, an under-secretary of the Foreign Minister, as Dutch director for Holland of the neutral committee. The Rotterdam office added that they considered the choice very fortunate and expected hearty co-operation.

The Commission was therefore in the position of being able on April 28 to inform the Foreign Office, the French Ambassador and the Belgian Minister that the new neutral committee 'is being placed on a satisfactory basis to take over the protection of the ravitaillement in the invaded territories. The full name of the new committee is: 'Comité Hispano-Hollandais pour la Protection du Ravitaillement de la Belgique et du Nord de la France' (Spanish-Dutch Committee for the Protection of the Relief in Belgium and Northern France).

**The Memorandum on the Reorganisation May 1, 1917.**—At the same time agreement was reached as to the respective functions of the new committee, the Commission for Relief in Belgium, the Comité National and the Comité Français. A memorandum was drawn up sketching the new organisation of the relief. This was presented to the Foreign Office, the French Ambassador, the Belgian Minister and the Spanish and Dutch representatives on May 1. This document is too long to be quoted in full. Its chief points have already been given and need only to be summarised.

**Functions of the C.R.B.—PART I.** dealt with the functions of the Commission for Relief in Belgium in the occupied territories. The Rotterdam office would determine the distribution of imports as between the Belgian and French districts. Supplies would be forwarded consigned directly to the Comité National or the Comité Français, care of the Comité National. The chief representative of the Commission for Relief in Belgium in Brussels would, in accord with the Comité National and the Comité Français, make reports to the Commission for Relief in Belgium through the Rotterdam office on shipping and distribution matters. Accounts and statistics would be handled by the Brussels and Rotterdam offices of the Commission for Relief in Belgium and reported as formerly to the London office. The distribution of supplies within the occupied territory should be handled by the various Belgian and French committees. The responsibility for the protection of the supplies from the moment they crossed the Belgian border would rest with the Comité Hispano-Hollandais.

**Functions of the New Committee.—PART II.** dealt with the organisation and functions of the 'Comité Hispano-Hollandais pour la Protection du Ravitaillement' (called

for short 'Comité de Protection'). In addition to the Dutch and Spanish chairmen at Brussels, the Dutch director in Holland and the Spanish directors in London, there were to be Spanish or Dutch representatives in each province or district. These representatives would be members of the local committees and would exercise much the same functions as their American predecessors. The Comité de Protection was to be responsible for safeguarding the supplies forwarded by the Commission for Relief in Belgium from the time they crossed the Belgian border until they had actually been distributed to the civil population; for the suppression of all illicit traffic in commodities imported under the guarantees, and for the carrying out of the guarantees, together with the patron Ministers. Any violations were to be brought directly to the attention of the patron Ministers. It would act with the Comité National and the Comité Français in all negotiations relative to the work of relief. Weekly reports were to be prepared by the chairmen concerning the protection of imports, the distribution of native products, and the observance of the guarantees by the Germans. These reports were to be forwarded to the director of the Comité de Protection in London. Copies should then be given to the London office of the Commission for Relief in Belgium, the British Government and the diplomatic representatives of France and Belgium in London. The Rotterdam office of the Commission for Relief in Belgium should receive a copy from the director in Holland of the Comité de Protection. From time to time the chairmen, as general protectors of the ravitaillement, should, in accord with the Comité National and the Comité Français, furnish the Commission for Relief in Belgium and the governments interested with reports and recommendations as to the general conditions and needs of the people of the occupied territories.

**The approval of the Allied Governments.**—This memorandum was soon approved by the allied governments, and the organisation described was immediately put into effect. On May 5 the French Embassy informed Mr. Poland that the French Government had 'attentively examined the memorandum of May 1. As one might expect from the Commission for Relief, which is aware of all the exigencies of the situation, this draft seems to present the maximum of guarantees and rapidity of execution.' The Belgian and British Governments likewise approved the memorandum. On May 19, Sir Eyre Crowe, of the Foreign Office, wrote that Lord Robert Cecil had directed him 'to inform you that the memorandum has been transmitted to the Spanish Ambassador and the Netherland Minister as accepted by the British, French and Belgian Governments, with a request that it may be communicated to the Spanish and Dutch chairmen of the new committee.'

**The question of Patrons for the New Committee.**—Shortly after the organisation of the Comité de Protection there arose a question as to the diplomatic patrons of the relief. Van Vollenhoven was raised in status from Chargé d'Affaires at Brussels to Resident Minister, and the Dutch Government were therefore desirous that he should be made, like Villalobar, a Minister Patron of the Comité de Protection. The patrons of the committee in the beginning of May were the Spanish Ambassador in London, the Spanish Minister at Brussels and the Dutch Minister to Belgium at Le Havre. After some discussion of the matter the Commission suggested that the Dutch Ministers at Brussels and London should be made patrons for the Comité de Protection, together with the Spanish Minister at The Hague, in addition to the three patrons who had formerly served in the same capacity with the Commission for Relief in Belgium.\*

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\* Letter of Poland to the Rotterdam Office, May 22, 1917.

On June 6, Senor Roura, director of the Comité de Protection in London, wrote Mr. Poland that Van Vollenhoven and the Spanish Minister at The Hague had been appointed patrons of the Comité de Protection. The complete list of patrons thus was :

Don Alfonso Merry del Val (Spanish Ambassador in London), Jonkheer van de Mares van Swinderen (Dutch Minister in London), El Marques de Villalobar (Spanish Minister in Brussels), Jonkheer de Weede (Dutch Minister to Belgium in Le Havre), Don Francisco Gutierrez Aguerra (Spanish Minister in The Hague), Mhr. von Vollenhoven (Dutch Minister in Brussels).

**The Solution of the Problem.**—The Dutch Government did not agree to this arrangement, however. They felt that as the Queen of Holland was a high patron of the neutral committee there was no necessity for another patron in Holland, and that in any case appointments should be made jointly by the Spanish and Dutch Governments.\* It was finally arranged that in order to settle the question and to have an equal number of Spanish and Dutch patrons, the Dutch Minister at Le Havre should resign as a patron in favour of Van Vollenhoven. The Spanish Minister in The Hague had not been officially notified of his appointment and did not desire to become a patron, so the matter was adjusted.† At the beginning of July Mr. Poland was informed by the Dutch Minister in London that the Spanish and Dutch Governments had agreed that the committee of patrons should consist of the Spanish Ambassador in London, the Dutch Minister in London and the Spanish and Dutch diplomatic representatives in Brussels.‡ Mr. Poland therefore informed the Foreign Office on July 12 that the question of the diplomatic patronage of the Comité de Protection had been settled; that the four patrons had been designated, and that in addition the Queen of Holland and the King of Spain had accepted patronage of the committee.

**The German Government approves the new regime.**—At the request of the Commission, the memorandum on the reorganisation of the relief was presented in May to the German Government for approval, by the Protecting Ministers in Brussels. On May 31 the Spanish Ambassador in Berlin requested whether the German Government gave its approval to the plan. Zimmermann, Foreign Minister, wrote the Spanish Ambassador in reply that the Governor-General in Belgium had given his approval to the proposals in the note concerning the organisation of the 'Commission for Relief in Belgium' and the new 'Comité Nentre pour la Protection du Ravitaillement.' Thus the diplomatic framework of the new committee was completed and the details of its work definitely agreed to by the belligerent governments and the protecting neutral countries.

**The Swiss Government offers assistance.**—On April 13 the Commission had been informed by the Swiss Minister in London that his country was ready to co-operate in the continuation of the relief, and would be glad to send several Swiss delegates to the occupied territories. He stated that the Spanish Government had already expressed a willingness to accept such co-operation, and that the Foreign Office expressed a similar opinion subject to the approval of the Commission. Mr. Hoover, in replying, said he would be delighted to have the co-operation of the Swiss, but that the situation was difficult as it was proposed to have Spanish and Dutch chairmen of the new committee and the form of organisation

\* Dispatch No. 634 from American Legation, The Hague, to American Embassy, London, June 15, 1917.

† Letter from Poland to Senor Roura, June 30, 1917.

‡ Letter of Dutch Minister van Swinderen to Mr. Poland, July 1917.

had not yet been completed. Until this had been accomplished no action could be taken on the offer of the Swiss Government.\*

On May 24 the Swiss Minister wrote again, referring to his previous letter, and announcing that he was instructed by his government 'to inform you that the Swiss Federal Council had designated as members of the Commission charged with the ravitaillement of Belgium and Northern France' two prominent Swiss, who would leave Switzerland for Belgium on June 1. In reply, Mr. Poland wrote on May 26 that the Spanish-Dutch Committee had taken over the work of the Commission for Relief in Belgium in the occupied territories and that the question of personnel rested in the hands of the directors of this committee. A copy of the Swiss Minister's letter had therefore been sent to Senor Roura, director in London of the Comité de Protection.

### CHANGES IN THE ORGANISATION OF THE C.R.B.

**The C.R.B. Office at Brussels.**—Meanwhile the whole organisation of the Commission for Relief in Belgium had to be recast. All the Commission's American staff was withdrawn from Belgium. It was still necessary to maintain an office in Brussels to look out for the interests of the Commission and to keep in intimate touch with conditions in the occupied territories. There was obviously but one man for the post at Brussels—M. Fernand Baetens—the only Belgian member of the Commission, who had so devotedly and ably served the Commission and his compatriots for nearly three years, as head of the shipping department in the Brussels office. He had been far more than shipping director; he had been the esteemed and indispensable adviser of all the American directors of the Commission.

**Baetens appointed representative of C.R.B. at Brussels.**—In accordance with the telegraphic instructions from Hoover, Gray wrote Baetens on April 25, on returning to Brussels from the conferences in Holland, notifying him that he had been named representative of the Commission for Relief in Belgium at Brussels and informing him of the functions of his office. He was to be responsible to the London and Rotterdam offices for all shipments in the occupied territories, was to take receipts for the shipments from the local Belgian and French committees on the delivery at the lighter or rail terminals. The goods were to be delivered in such proportions and at such places as should be indicated by the Comité National. He should co-operate in all ways with the Comité National and should keep the Commission for Relief in Belgium generally informed of all matters of shipping and distribution.

As Gray pointed out: 'This involves considerable responsibility, which I envy you, but your conscientious work in the Commission for Relief in Belgium on behalf of the Belgian people since December 1914 makes it obvious why Mr. Hoover has chosen you to carry on the task that we must of necessity lay down.'

**Gray's letter explaining the new régime.**—In a letter of the same date (April 23), Gray also informed M. Francqui, the Marquis de Villalobar and Mr. Van Vollenhoven, of the organisation of the new neutral committee, of the functions to be performed by it and of the appointment of Baetens as the Commission for Relief in Belgium representative

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\* Hoover to M. Carlin, Swiss Minister in London, April 14.



in Brussels to carry on the work of the Brussels office. A copy of the letter to Baetens was annexed to these letters and the approval of each of the above persons was requested.

**Franco's reply.**—On April 27, M. Franco replied to Gray's letter, stating that he was in entire agreement with the plans proposed. He thanked once more the Commission 'for the services which the delegates of the Commission for Relief in Belgium and especially its last director have rendered to our people by their activities and their untiring devotion.'

**The reply of the Marquis de Villalobar.**—The Marquis de Villalobar, writing on April 26, said he was pleased to inform Gray that his government was in complete agreement with the plan proposed for the work of the new committee, and wished to contribute all it could to the work of relief in Belgium. He asked Gray to inform Hoover, in the name of the Spanish Government as well as for himself, of the gratitude due to Hoover for the interest he had shown in the fate of Belgium and for the organisation of the new arrangements 'which unhappily were made necessary by the declaration of war between the United States and Germany.' The Marquis also complimented Gray on his work and expressed regret at his departure. He wrote: 'I had hoped to keep you amongst us directing, alongside the Belgians and in spite of the German occupation, the Commission for Relief, which has contributed so much to the ravitaillement and secours and maintenance of this noble people in the hours of anguish through which it is passing. As I know well, your work in this mission is not ending, but I would have wished for your collaboration nearer to us.'

Van Vollenhoven, about to become the Dutch Minister at Brussels, also wrote on April 26 that he quite agreed with the new arrangement.

**The New Committee at work.**—As soon as the Spanish and Dutch had definitely approved the new arrangement, the work in Belgium was turned over to them. The Dutch chairman was already at Brussels and the Spanish chairman arrived at the beginning of May. During the month of April the Dutch and Spanish delegates gradually accustomed themselves to their duties, and when Gray left with the final party of Americans on May 1, the Comité Hispano-Hollandais was actively at work in Belgium.

By May 1 seven Dutch and five Spanish delegates were in Belgium; within a few weeks others had arrived. Delegates had gone to the districts of Northern France and the period of transition from the old regime, that of the Commission for Relief in Belgium, to the new, that of the Comité Hispano-Hollandais, was over.

**Mr. Poland becomes Director for Europe of the C.R.B.**—While these changes were taking place inside Belgium, the organisation of the Commission outside were remodelled somewhat to meet the new conditions. Mr. Hoover while in Washington had been asked to direct the work of husbanding America's food resources for the allied cause. In April he was selected chairman of the Food Board of the Committee of National Defence, with the understanding that as soon as Congress voted the necessary authorisation he would be made National Food Administrator. Mr. Hoover decided he could not refuse this call to service in a wider and greater field. This made it impossible for him longer to retain the direct and personal supervision of the work of the Commission that he had exercised since October 1914. In Mr. W. B. Poland, however, Hoover had a man who was admirably fitted to the task of continuing the work of the Commission for Relief in Belgium. Mr. Poland had been first assistant director of the Brussels office and later, from December 1915 to July 1916, director. He had then gone to England as director of the London office and had filled that difficult position up to April 1917 with the efficiency

and devoted self-sacrifice characteristic of the man. When Hoover returned to America, at the end of April, Poland became director for Europe of the Commission. Hoover retained chairmanship of the Commission, but the greater part of the burden of piloting the Commission through its ever-recurring crises after April 1917 fell upon Mr. Poland.

**C.R.B. personnel in the Food Administration.**—Dr. Kellogg returned to Washington to serve under Hoover in the National Food Administration. John B. White and Edgar Rickard, who after serving in the London office had aided in the work of the Commission in the New York office, also joined the Food Administration. Mr. Honnold remained as director of the New York office. He was joined in June by Prentiss Gray, who became assistant-director and assumed charge of the shipping and purchase arrangements of the New York office. Gray retained this position until February 1918, when he was called to Washington to represent the Food Administration and the Commission for Relief in Belgium on the Shipping Board.

**The London Office 1917-1918.**—Meanwhile the men in the London office continued with their work as before. In July 1917, Lewis Richards came from Rotterdam to act as assistant-director of the London office, and remained throughout 1917-1918. He was an invaluable aid to Mr. Poland, as his long service with the Commission and his ability made it possible for him to relieve Mr. Poland of many of the onerous burdens he had previously carried and to direct the work during Mr. Poland's frequent visits to Paris and Rotterdam. Mr. Poland, following Hoover's traditions, kept in close touch and personal contact with the problems of the various offices of the Commission. He went to Rotterdam in November 1917 and again in February and in June 1918 to have conferences with the Rotterdam office, with M. Franequi, M. Baetens and the Marquis de Villalobar, as well as with representatives of the Comité Hispano-Hollandais, with reference to the conditions in the occupied territories and the program of the Commission.

**Personnel of the London Office.**—The various departments of the London office remained under the same direction that had carried on the work previous to the withdrawal from the occupied territories. Millard Shaler continued his work and on the departure of Mr. Sengier took over the direction of the financial side of the work. Mr. J. A. Nash and Mr. W. I. Cozens managed the shipping department, Mr. G. I. Gay kept the statistical records of the work in order, while Mr. Robinson Smith as food expert and editor-extraordinary rendered a variety of services. In 1917 a number of the men who had come from Belgium were on duty for a short while in the London office. Mr. M. M. Brown organized an extensive program for purchasing and shipping clothing to Belgium, and after the acceptance of the program by the Foreign Office went to the New York office to take charge of the clothing program. J. L. Simpson, A. C. B. Fletcher and F. C. Wickes all spent some time aiding in the preparation of the Commission's reports before going into the service of the American Government. J. C. Green began the compilation of the official history but left in May to take a commission in the army. The work which he had begun was then taken over by T. B. Kittredge, who was at work throughout 1917 and 1918 in the preparation of these pages.

**The Rotterdam Office 1917-1918.**—The Rotterdam office under the direction of W. L. Brown had a task even more difficult than before the withdrawal from Belgium, but continued to discharge it with the traditional efficiency of the office. A. C. B. Fletcher succeeded Lewis Richards as assistant-director in July 1917, and remained with Mr. Brown and M. Van den Branden throughout 1917 and 1918. Something of the work done in those years will be related in the next chapters.

## NOTE

With the chapters included in this history, the story of the relief work in Belgium and Northern France has been brought up to May 1917. It was at this time that the American withdrawal from Belgium and Northern France and the organisation of the Spanish-Dutch Committee marked the beginning of a new period in the history of the relief. For purposes of convenience it has therefore been decided to break off the present volume at this point.

When the work of the Commission for Relief in Belgium is finally completed, it is hoped that the history can be completed from May 1917 to the date of the final ending of the work. Further chapters will then be written and added to the present volume.

In one way this division of the history is satisfactory, since with the departure of the Americans from Belgium the whole character of the situation changed, and the new regime was necessarily of a very different character from the old. The Commission for Relief in Belgium continued through its offices in London, New York and Rotterdam to purchase and ship to Belgium the food necessary for the population of Belgium and Northern France, but the Commission for Relief in Belgium had no longer any part save that of a nominal supervision, exercised through its representative at Brussels, over the actual distribution of the work in the occupied territories. This was carried on chiefly by the Belgian and French committees with the assistance of the members of the Comité Hispano-Hollandais pour la Protection du Ravitaillement.





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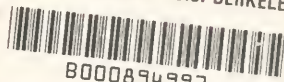




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