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UNRRA OPERATIONS IN POLAND

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UNRRA Operations
In Poland

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UNRRA will encounter much the same problems in every country where it carries on field operations, in spite of considerable variations among countries. I will therefore attempt to stress such problems which are specific for Poland. It is the magnitude of the UNRRA task in Poland which is unsurpassed anywhere in Europe. Poland, the first victim of the Wehrmacht, has been under occupation longer than any country except Czechoslovakia; and it has suffered the additional misfortune of becoming a battleground for a second time during the war. The warfare and enemy occupation have reduced the country to the lowest possible level; the shortage of food and clothing and health conditions are about the worst in Europe; about 90% of the population has been displaced, either internally or externally.

A special problem also arises in Poland from the concentration of Jews there: the Jewish population in Poland amounted to over 3 million before the war and the Germans have sent about 1.5 million Jews into Poland from other countries under their control. Most of them have been murdered. Still the small number of them who survived present a special problem.

Altogether, the task of relief and rehabilitation may amount in Poland to an almost complete reconstruction of the national life and economy.

Our work is made even more difficult because it is impossible, for lack of adequate up-to-date information, to plan our operations in advance to any satisfactory degree.

The chief problem that arises for UNRRA in passing from the stage of examining and preparing plans to the stage of actual field operations, comes from the geographical location of the country. UNRRA will be able to deliver supplies directly to the shores of most of the European countries in which it will operate. But we cannot make direct delivery to Poland until the ports of Danzig, Gdynia or at least Trieste are made available. We can send relief supplies in the meantime only through the Soviet Union. This would be difficult enough even if the Dardanelles were opened and the port of Odessa made useable. But we can actually use only the long and overburdened routes through the White Sea and the Persian Gulf.

The Soviet government has already shown its concern for the relief problem in Poland and has sent in supplies from its own sources. But we cannot build up an UNRRA relief program for Poland on the basis of a decrease in the amount of shipping and transport available for the supplies for the Red Army. That would run counter to the principle of "Everything for the front," the fundamental principle of the Soviet people and of the whole United Nations war effort.

The problem of UNRRA operations in Poland thus comes to-day down to this: we can undertake operations only to the extent that we can find tonnage and transport in addition to that used for military supplies. The plain fact is that we do not have the ships now, and the reason we don't have them is because the war is still going on and still making vast demands for transport.

The political crisis in Poland, in spite of its complexity actually presents less difficulty to UNRRA operations than the shipping problem.

The Polish London government has formally requested the full assistance of UNRRA for Poland.

The PCNL which actually exercises governmental authority in the liberated areas of Poland; has through its president Osobka-Morawski sent a cable to the Montreal Conference on September 15, requesting UNRRA assistance and summarizing the needs of the area. The Director-General has announced that he will send a delegation of technical experts to Lublin to negotiate an agreement for the establishment of a mission in Liberated Poland.

The delegation has now been assembled. It is made up of 12 men, 8 from Headquarters and 4 from London. The delegation will leave as soon as visas for transit through Soviet territory and transportation to Europe can be obtained.

This, then, is the immediate prospect: we will achieve something if we can arrange for monthly supply of at least 25,000-30,000 tons of shipping: that will constitute a large accomplishment in view of the shortage of shipping, the burden on Soviet port facilities and the strain on railroad transport through soviet territory. Yet this amount of supplies would make only a small fraction of a minimum program for the liberated area of Poland. Moreover, we can expect that our problem will grow more difficult with every advance of the Red Army until the collapse of Germany. The area of Poland so far liberated west of the Curzon line includes only 7.5 million persons and the most heavily populated regions of Poland are still under German occupation.

We will thus find that while our responsibilities will increase rapidly as new territory is liberated, the problem of transporting supplies will grow more difficult until final victory.

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