

Alsaac, Upper - Conditions

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UNITED NATIONS  
RELIEF AND REHABILITATION ADMINISTRATION

21 March 1945

TO: Mr. Menshikov ✓  
Mr. Rodnov

FROM: Louis R. Franck *LF*

SUBJECT: Situation in liberated Upper Alsace.

You will find attached herewith the highlights of Mr. Pierce Williams' report from February 17-21, 1945, regarding the situation in Upper Alsace.

My conclusions and recommendations follow:

1. It will not be wise to expect an immediate contribution of French potash from the liberated potash mines to other liberated countries in Europe. Although about one-half of the mines have not been damaged, they still depend on rehabilitation of electric current and on an improvement of the dwelling situation for the potash miners.

2. The textile industry of Upper Alsace (cotton mills) depends for an early resumption of its activities on an important work of rehabilitation of the electric facilities. As long as the power situation of these plants will not have seriously improved, I don't believe it will be wise to take account of their eventual contribution to any plan of manufacturing in France of cotton goods with imported cotton for re-export in other liberated countries.

3. If UNRRA could help, it should be mainly for shelter, clothing and food. It seems very dubious to me that UNRRA could help by providing France with pre-fabricated, knocked-down, barracks. But we might follow with ERO in London the distribution of some clothing, footwear and food to the population of liberated Upper Alsace, particularly in the form of an outright gift to the French Coordinating Welfare Agency, "Entr'aide Francaise."

Attachment



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21 March 1945

TO: Mr. Menshikov  
Mr. Rodnov

FROM: Louis R. Franck

SUBJECT: Report by Pierce Williams of his visit to Upper Alsace,  
February 17-21, 1945.

The highlights of the interesting report by Pierce Williams of his visit to upper Alsace follow:

1. Potash Mines

Of 14 mines, six are ready to operate; another five would require from five to six months to rehabilitate; three would, it is estimated, take over a year. Both coal and electrical power are still lacking and resumption of mining on a full scale is hardly likely to be feasible for some time to come. It is also stressed that the man-power problem presents difficulties due to the damage suffered by the workers dwellings in the miners' towns. These workers would need to be provided with temporary housing before they could resume regular work in the potash mines.

Although Mr. Pierce Williams does not make any forecast as to the quantity of potash which will be eventually dug out in the coming future, it does not seem, according to his report, that large quantities, if any, could be made available by France for re-export to other liberated areas.

Many miners from the potash mines are Polish workers; on account of military operations many of these miners are now refugees in nearby villages; they are not displaced persons insofar as they worked in the Alsace potash mines for many years before the war broke out. It is necessary, if the potash miners should resume operations shortly, that some temporary habitation - barracks or other - should be provided for the Polish miners in the villages from which they had to be evacuated.

2. Textile Plants

The damage to textile and machine construction plants is not serious and no considerable quantity of industrial equipment was carried off into Germany by the Nazi authorities. But most of these textile plants operate on purchased current; one of the important generating stations, Kemps, on the Rhine, has been seriously damaged by enemy action. The

distribution system throughout Upper Alsace is out of commission, chiefly because the transformers lack oil; furthermore, many of the towers carrying the transmission lines have been knocked down by artillery fire. Some power, it may be expected, will be obtainable from nearby Swiss hydro-electric plants and by tying in the plants of the Moselle area when liberated.

Anyway, according to Mr. Williams, little would be gained by the importation of cotton and other raw materials in advance of the re-establishment of the electric power industry. If we remember that in pre-war time 46% of the spindles and 53% of the power looms of the French cotton industry were located in Alsace and eastern France, we will immediately understand that any plan to utilize France as a country for manufacturing cotton goods for other liberated areas with imported cotton should take into account the preliminary necessity of establishing the electrical power industry on which textile plants are dependent.

### 3. Saw Mills

Scattered through upper Alsace are numerous small saw-mills, practically all<sup>ly</sup> dependent on electric current for their operations. If power could be assured them, they could turn out a considerable quantity of lumber for rebuilding.

### 4. Suggested UNRRA Help

Housing is the outstanding problem at the moment in Upper Alsace, and if UNRRA, in some miraculous way, could supply 200,000 square feet of pre-fabricated, knocked down barracks (not necessarily family dwellings) it would be a God-send.

As to relief goods, UNRRA might canvas the possibility of making an outright gift to Entr'aide Francaise for a quantity of special food items, such as would not be available either in the general food resources of France or in those which the Sixth Army Group might be able to spare from its own Civil Affairs stocks. A gift of clothing to Entr'aide Francaise and also of footwear would be welcome.