No. 2061

Chungking, January 28, 1944

Subject: The Refugee Relief Problem at Kwelilin.

AIR MAIL

The Honorable
The Secretary of State:
Washington 25, D.C.

Sir:

Referring to the Department’s mail instruction no. 42 of October 19, 1943 (File no. 846.18 refugees/4107), and regard to a suggested project for the development of wartime industries among refugees in Kwangtung and Kwangsi Provinces, I have the honor to enclose a copy of despatch no. 99 of January 8, 1944, from the Consulate at Kwelilin, on this subject.

In his despatch, which contains an adequate summary, Mr. Service indicates that the refugee problem at Kwelilin has been temporarily solved by the large amount of employment created by United States army construction projects in that area but points out that Father Thomas Ryan, who suggested the project for the training of industrial workers in south China mentioned in the Department’s instruction under reference, feels that no solution has yet been found for the refugee problem which will appear again when the construction boom has ended.

Father Ryan has evidently proceeded no further with his project than the stage of recommendation and the Embassy forwarded to the Department a copy of the memorandum of June 13, 1943, from the Consulate at Kwelilin (Embassy’s despatch no. 211), June 30) with the intention of bringing to the Department’s attention the large refugee problem in southeast China rather than with any idea that Father Ryan’s project would ever materialize to the extent that it would be either practical or would be given serious consideration by the Chinese authorities. The Embassy has, therefore, taken any action to bring to the attention of the Chinese authorities Professor Paul H. Eaton’s experience in this field nor has it discussed the matter with him.

Respectfully yours,

[Signature]

Enclosure:

From the Consulate at Kwelilin, despatch no. 96 dated January 8, 1944.

Single copy to the Department
8468
FDR/hr
Subject: Some Aspects of the Refugee Relief Problem at Kwailin.

The Honorable
Clarence E. Gause,
American Ambassador,
Chungking.

SIR:

I have the honor to refer to the Embassy's instruction of November 27, 1943 and to this Consulate's memorandum of June 13, 1943 concerning a suggestion outlined by the Reverend Thomas Ryan, S. J., for the proposed establishment of a joint American-British-Chinese project for the development of war-time industries among refugees in Kowangtung and Kwangchow provinces.

SUMMARY: Father Thomas Ryan stated that the refugee problem in Kwailin has temporarily been solved by the large amount of employment which has been created in the establishment of United States Army bases in this area. Unemployment will appear in significant numbers again when this construction boom is over. There has been no effort to set up industrial training in preparation for post-war industrial expansion, and Father Ryan believes that such a program should be fostered by all types of American and British missionary and philanthropic educational institutions. He has supported the removal from India to China of war plants, when transportation facilities permit, wherein Chinese may receive technical training of the type which will fit them for work with machines.

The subject of current developments in the refugee problem in this area was discussed by Father Ryan with the writer on January 5, 1944. Father Ryan stressed that there has yet been no approach to the underlying problem of giving industrial training to future factory workers in South China. He stated that he has recommended to two or three officials of the British Government the useful purposes which might be served by the establishment in this area of a factory transplanted from India as soon as transportation facilities are available. He believes that such a factory, manufacturing war material such as hand grenades, small arms, or other military equipment, could be established in South China for the dual purpose of supplying Allied or Chinese troops with equipment and for the intensive training of factory workers. It is his impression that his recommendations have been passed on to higher quarters for consideration.

Efforts to relieve the lot of refugees in Kwailin have not been lacking. In February and March of 1943 a
committee under the leadership of Mr. A. McLellan, head 
of the refugee relief department of the British Consulate 
general at Kweilin, and including Father Ryan and a few 
others, was set up and organized a number of mutual aid 
groups among refugees in this city. At that time there 
were several hundred carpenters from Burma who were 
without work and entirely destitute. The sum of $20,000 
was made available to the committee by the Kweilin 
International Relief Committee at that time. An equal 
sum was received from the British embassy in Chungking, 
from funds of the British Red Cross. 

Carpenters who 
joined the mutual aid groups were helped to obtain tools 
and were given work to do, largely of a repair nature.

It was found that these carpenters, after a long period 
of unemployment, required a month or more to adjust 
themselves to working conditions. Soon after the forma-
tion of these groups the construction activities of the 
United States Army in this area gained momentum, and 
the Refugee Relief Department of the British Consulate 
General began to place carpenters with contractors who 
were working on Army projects and with the Army itself.

In June and July the demand became heavy and it was 
apparent that the problem of unemployment among carpen-
ters was being liquidated.

It was the intention of the committee to set up 
mutual aid groups for laundry and baking work, but it 
was found that among the refugees only women were inter-
ested in this work, and most of the women in need and 
employable husbands or could not give their time becau-
se of the necessity of caring for their children. The 
committee intended to apply to Madame Chiang Kai-
shek's relief fund and to the Burma government to support 
the formation of a laundry and a bakery. The committee 
was able to obtain permission to use a piece of land 
from the Kweilin municipality and secured an additional 
grant of $20,000 from British Red Cross funds for the 
purpose of erecting a mat-shed to house the laundry and 
bakery, but decided to suspend further relief operations 
for the time being.

Father Ryan believes that the large amount of 
employment due to United States Army construction work 
which has absorbed many refugees in this area, is only 
a temporary solution to the problem, as there is no 
promise of further work when construction is completed.

Of the various classes of refugees in this area as 
categorized as follows:

(1) Men and women of the coolie class and semi-skilled 
manual laborers. A large proportion of these have 
secured employment in the tremendous construction 
projects connected with American bases in South China.

(2) Clerks. Many clerks have obtained minor adminis-
trative positions in hostels and in such organizations 
as the war area Service Corps. A considerable number have 
become room-boys and dining-room-boys in hostels because 
of their knowledge of English, and the best of these have 
often
often been promoted to positions as interpreters and office boys.

(3) Students. Many students have become interpreters with the United States Army and other organizations in South China.

(4) Skilled Workmen. Radio operators and others have been given employment by the China National Aviation Corporation and by the Chinese Government; and the nature of their employment has scattered them to various parts of the country and in some cases to India.

(5) Professional Men. Some engineers have found employment with the National Resources Commission and other Government organizations, although salary levels are low and the wives of such individuals have often been required to work in order to help support their families. Many doctors have entered private practice, being reluctant to serve with the Chinese Government because of insufficient pay.

Father Ryan believes that the large numbers of clerks from Hong Kong who found themselves stranded without opportunities to continue their work within China are now more adaptable to their surroundings, and in this respect have benefited by their experience. It is his opinion that a considerable proportion of these clerks would be willing to participate in any training program which could be established to fit them for industrial work. He also considers that they will be at a disadvantage after the war if they attempt to return to clerical work, due to younger, newly trained applicants who would be willing to work for lower salaries. Father Ryan feels strongly that foreign missionary enterprises in China should turn to technical and specialized training in their schools after the war, and hopes that concrete steps will be taken in this direction.

Respectfully yours,

Richard W. Service, 
American Vice Consul.

Original and one copy to the Embassy, Chungking.

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