

Common Council For American Unity

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COMMON COUNCIL FOR AMERICAN UNITY  
INCORPORATED  
222 FOURTH AVENUE, NEW YORK 3, N. Y.

July 7, 1944

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Miss Anne Laughlin  
Special Assistant to the Executive Director  
Executive Office of the President  
War Refugee Board  
Washington 25, D C

Dear Miss Laughlin:

Thank you very much for your letter of  
July 1st.

We have forwarded to you additional copies  
of the publications specified in your letter,  
and are glad that you find them helpful.

I do hope you will let me know when you plan  
to come to New York as I shall be very glad  
indeed to meet you and talk with you concern-  
ing refugee problems, in which we are mutually  
interested.

Sincerely yours,

*Cecilia Razovsky Davidson*  
Cecilia Razovsky Davidson

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(Mrs) ELIZABETH EASTMAN  
WASHINGTON REPRESENTATIVE  
COMMON COUNCIL FOR AMERICAN UNITY  
222 6th Ave. N.Y.C.

2266 CATHEDRAL AVENUE

TELEPHONE: ADAMS 5802

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MAR 16 1944

Dear Miss Eastman:

There is returned to you herewith the article which you recently left with us and which the Common Council for American Unity wishes to publish.

The War Refugee Board has no objection to the publication of this article.

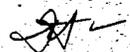
Very truly yours,

(Signed) J. W. Pehle

J. W. Pehle  
Acting Executive Director

Miss Elizabeth Eastman,  
2266 Cathedral Avenue,  
Washington, D. C.

Enclosure.

  
FH:lab 3/15/44

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3/9/44

PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT ESTABLISHES REFUGEE RESCUE BOARD

Sources: Federal Register  
Congressional Record  
Department of State  
Other.

A War Refugee Board, consisting of the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury, and the Secretary of War, has been established by the President's Executive Order #9417, dated January 22, 1944\*. In the text of the Order, which is published as an appendix to this Release, the Board is charged with the responsibility for seeing that all measures within the power of the Government to rescue victims of enemy oppression who are in imminent danger of death are carried out. The functions of the Board include the development of plans for "(a) the rescue, transportation, maintenance and relief of victims of enemy oppression, and (b) the arrangement of havens of temporary refuge for such victims".

With the setting up of this War Refugee Board by the Executive Order, efforts to rescue refugees will not have to wait upon action by Congress on the Bills now pending before the Senate (S.203) and the House (H.Res. 350 and H.Res. 352), which urge the appointment of a Commission of diplomatic, economic and military experts "to formulate and effectuate a plan of immediate action designed to save the surviving Jewish people of Europe from extinction at the hands of Nazi Germany".\*\* (It will be recalled that the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs approved S.203, and that although hearings were held by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs on Bills H.Res. 350 and H.Res. 352, no action was taken by that Committee).

Refugee Board Announced Its Initial Plans

Four days after its appointment, the new War Refugee Board issued a

\* Federal Register - Vol. 9, No. 18, January 26, 1944, pages 935, 936.

\*\* Interpreter Release - Vol. XX, No. 45, December 14, 1943, page 389.

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statement announcing that negotiations were already under way with foreign governments to determine the extent to which they were working to cooperate in rescuing Jews and other victims of Nazi aggression. Secretaries Hull, Morgenthau, and Stimson also announced that all United States diplomats and consular officers throughout the world had been instructed "to do everything possible to effectuate this Government's war-refugee policy as announced by the President, bearing in mind the urgency of the problem." According to an article in the New York Times (January 30, 1944) the Board said that the diplomatic and consular officers had also been instructed to cooperate with all public agencies and established private organizations in the rescue area, and had been requested to make "immediate reports concerning conditions existing in each country with regard to whether refugees would be permitted to enter, and where refugees were refused entry at frontiers, explanations why they were refused".

The Board is responsible to the President and is directed to work with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), the Intergovernmental Committee, and other appropriate international organizations. The appointment of an Executive Director, which is included in the Order, has already been made. Mr. John W. Pehle has secured leave of absence from his former position as Assistant to the Secretary of the Treasury and Director of Foreign Funds Control, to become the Acting Executive Director of the Board. He was born in Minneapolis, is 35 years of age and took his law degree at Yale University.

Hailed as a means of clearing the road for effective action, the many interested American agencies which have been pressing for immediate measures to be taken by our Government to rescue the victims of Nazi oppression are eagerly awaiting opportunities to cooperate with the Board. That these opportunities will not be withheld is already evidenced from the fact that the Board has addressed a letter to many established agencies that have been working overseas on these problems, asking for advice and ideas as to how the Board can more efficiently and more quickly carry out this program of rescue. The Board has welcomed conferences

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representatives of such agencies, many of whom have already taken advantage of the opportunity to present their suggestions for rescue programs. One organization, the HIAS, evinced its appreciation of the establishment of the Board by sending a contribution of \$100,000. to be placed at the disposal of the War Refugee Board, together with an offer of the services of its offices and personnel. The Treasury Department announced that the first contribution to the War Refugee Board was a check for \$10. from a Jewish refugee and his wife, living in a small Ohio town. This money was contributed by this elderly couple as a token of their gratitude for having been "admitted and accepted as equals in this country".

Past Efforts to Rescue Victims of Nazis in Axis-occupied or Axis Territory

The history of the various attempts made by interested private organizations to secure official action on the rescue of the persecuted peoples, Jews and others, inside Axis-occupied territory, has been reported in earlier Interpreter Releases.\* The distressing reports, on the basis of information received from underground information, of the mass executions and deportations of Jews give the figures of two to four million deported or perished. The numbers of other peoples suffering the same fate are unknown, but the wholesale massacres by the Nazis, which took place in Poland in the summer of 1942, caused the United States\*\* and the European members of the United Nations to jointly condemn "the appalling horror and brutality" with which the minorities were being persecuted, and to promise retributions for those responsible for the murders.

As time went on and no immediate plans for rescuing these unfortunates were outlined by the United Nations, pressure began to be put upon the President and Congress, as well as upon the general public, to take decisive steps in this regard. Full-page advertisements appeared in the New York dailies calling for immediate aid to rescue the remaining victims of Nazi oppression before it was too

\*\* "Can European Refugees Find New Home" - by Winifred N. Jadsel, published by Foreign Policy Association.

\* See Interpreter Releases, Vols XV No. 48, Nov. 29, 1938; Vol. XVI, No. 35, July 24, 1939; Vol. XVI, No. 32, July 6, 1939; Vol. XVIII No. 4, Jan. 24, 1941; Vol. XX, No. 9, March 19, 1943; Vol. XXI No. 1, Jan. 10, 1944.

late. A petition and appeal by the Rabbis of America for the adoption of immediate and practical measures to save the Jewish people from complete extermination was presented to the Senate by Vice President Wallace, to whom the petition was addressed, with the following appeal\*:

To the Honorable Henry Agard Wallace,  
Vice President of the United States:

In the name of God, creator of the universe, blessed be He, who voiced in our Holy Torah the command: "Thou shalt not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor, I am the Lord."

In this hour of our distress we call upon the Almighty, Lord of Heaven and earth in the ancient words: "A voice on high is heard, the voice of our brothers' blood -- innocent souls by the tens of thousands, children, infants, and sucklings--the aged, men and women, cry out unto us: 'Save us!'"

How can we face the Lord on the hallowed day, the Day of Atonement, knowing that we have not fulfilled our duty? And on the eve of this day most holy to us, we come broken-hearted to ask you, Mr. Vice President, to hear the cries of our brethren, now in the hands of the murderous Nazi government which singled out the people of Israel as its target and has decreed their annihilation and oblivion. The Nazis have poured out their rage against our people with a horrible cruelty unequalled by the savages of ancient days. Millions of Jews have already fallen, exterminated with fire and sword; tens of thousands have died of starvation and have been victims of barbarous and unnatural executions .....

From every established national organization in this country, interested in the plight of the suffering peoples, came memorials and petitions to the officials. National committees representing distinguished chairmen of all faiths and creeds, public officials, Senators, Congressmen, labor and civic leaders, all stressed the need for aid before it was too late. Mass meetings were held, and many magazine and newspaper articles were published on this subject. Appeals were introduced in both the Senate and the House (see page ) calling for the appointment by the President of a Commission to deal with these problems. In England, too, attention was being focused on the need for rescue. In London, the National

\* Congressional Record - October 6, 1943, page 8195.

Committee for Rescue from Nazi Persecution (April 1943) published "Twelve Point Programme for Immediate Rescue Measures". A Public Opinion Poll, taken in March, 1943, indicated that 78% of the British people wanted its government to help refugees escape from occupied Europe. Since the creation of our War Refugee Board, there has been considerable agitation in England for an appointment of a similar body there.

What Can Be Done By the War Refugee Board?

The new Acting Executive Director, Mr. Pehle, in a press interview\* explained that one of the first and most important tasks of the Board will be to see that refugees are moved out of European neutral countries to make room for others who might escape from Nazi countries to take their places. The prompt transfer of refugees from those neutral countries such as Spain, might, Mr. Pehle said, make those governments be more willing to give sanctuary to other refugees reaching their land by the underground routes, or by negotiations with the satellite countries. It is expected that the chief helpers will be in the underground organizations existing in all Nazi-dominated countries. While the Board will have only a small, professional staff, it will be able to use the personnel of other government agencies and will also work through the private international agencies. A radio commentator recently described the work of the Board as being comparable to the underground activities during the Civil War when Negro slaves were helped to escape to the North.

An indication of the speed with which the Board is working is the announcement of the arrival in Ankara, Turkey, of Ira A. Hirschmann to take up his duties as official representative of the newly formed Refugee Board. Under the authority vested by the Treasury in the War Refugee Board, it was announced that Mr. Hirschmann will be the first and only United States citizen in Turkey to be allowed to disregard the Trading with the Enemy Act.

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\* New York Times - February 5, 1944.

Governmental and Voluntary Organizations Dealing with Refugee Problems

There have been but a few governmental organizations set up since 1933 to aid refugees, as a brief review will show: First there was the High Commission for Refugees (Jewish and other), organized in 1933 by the League of Nations with James G. McDonald as High Commissioner and Joseph P. Chamberlain as the representative on the Commission for the United States. In 1935 Mr. McDonald resigned. The High Commission was reorganized and combined with the Nanson Committee of the League of Nations. At the present time Sir Herbert Emerson is High Commissioner. With conditions in Germany growing steadily worse, President Roosevelt proposed an Intergovernmental Conference on Refugees, which was held at Evian, France, in July 1938. As a result of that conference there was organized the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees. That organization found itself paralyzed by the onslaught on the war and has been practically defunct, until it was recently revived by the Bermuda Conference, which was held in the Spring of 1943\*. It has now been reorganized and has its offices in London. Sir Herbert Emerson is the Director and Patrick Murphy Malin, an American, is the Vice Director. In the United States, the President's Committee on Political Refugees was appointed in 1940 with George L. Warren as Secretary, for the purpose of rescuing some of the political refugees of Europe. With our entry into the war there seemed an end to any further hope of rescue. Transportation became practically unavailable, with the exception of a few Portuguese steamers that carried a few hundred passengers each month to the safe shores of the Western Hemisphere.

The organization of the Office of Foreign Relief and Rehabilitation Operations (OFRRRO), with Herbert H. Lehman as Director, while not designed to give aid only to refugees, nevertheless included them in their program of relief. Later Mr. Lehman was appointed Special Assistant to the President and some of the activities of the OFRRRO

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\* See Interpreter Release - Vol XXI, No. 1, January 10, 1944, page 7.

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were merged with the Foreign Economic Administration. In the Fall of 1943 the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration was organized with Herbert H. Lehman appointed as Director General. A substantial part of the staff of the OFRRO was taken over by the UNRRA\*.

In addition to these governmental war organizations, a number of voluntary agencies in this field are collaborating with the President's War Refugee Board and other government organizations in their plans. A description of these agencies and their programs together with details regarding the UNRRA will appear in a forthcoming Interpreter Release.

#### Numbers of Refugees Needing Rescue

Authoritative figures are not available as to the number of individuals now living in enemy and enemy-occupied countries whose rescue is contemplated under this program. No program could be set up at this time to encompass all the persons who would want to escape from the oppressive domination of the Nazis. But among the individuals to be aided by the President's War Board are those who are now in hiding because they are being sought by the Nazis for purposes of destruction or deportation. Reports indicate that there are over 60,000 refugees of every nationality now in Switzerland, many of these having escaped from the Nazis in Northern Italy and from France. It is said that more than sixty persons daily manage to cross into Switzerland over the French border. In Sweden there are at least 10,000 refugees who succeeded in escaping from Denmark recently. Refugees in the Balkans are making every effort to slip through into Turkey. A few have managed to escape. If the cooperation of the Turkish government can be secured, many of the hunted and persecuted in Rumania and Bulgaria may be rescued through Constanza and the Black Sea. A few Greek Jews succeeded in escaping to Syria where they were interned until they sailed recently for Palestine. Reports have been received that in Holland are thousands in hiding for whom rescue some plans might be evolved. The few thousand who managed to reach Spain are gradually being transported to other safe countries. In any event, the

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\* Department of State Bulletin, October 2, 1943, Vol. 9, No. 223.

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objectives of the President's War Refugee Board have the blessing and assurance of cooperation from all the actively interested agencies and individuals in this country, who regard this step as one concrete method of implementing the Atlantic Charter.

In reply please  
refer to: 218

FEB 29 1944

Dear Mrs. Davidson:

Thank you for your letter of February  
23, 1944. The literature referred to in your  
letter has been received by this office.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) J. W. Pehle

J. W. Pehle  
Acting Executive Director

Mrs. Cecilia Basovsky Davidson,  
Common Council for American Unity,  
222 Fourth Avenue,  
New York 3, New York.

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COMMON COUNCIL FOR AMERICAN UNITY  
INCORPORATED  
222 FOURTH AVENUE, NEW YORK 3, N. Y.

February 23, 1944

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HANNY COHRSEN  
PAUL LAVAL

Mr. John W. Pehle, Executive Director  
President's War Refugee Board  
Treasury Department  
Washington, D C

Attention: Miss Hodel

Dear Miss Hodel:

It was good of you to spare the time to talk with me the other day in Washington and I am very grateful to you for your courtesy.

In accordance with my promise, there is being mailed to you under separate cover literature describing some of the activities of our organization, particularly the Interpreter Releases edited by me.

The Release on the President's War Refugee Board is in the course of preparation, and as soon as it is completed I shall send it to Miss Elizabeth Eastman, who is our Washington representative, and will ask her to take it to you so it can be cleared before we issue it.

Again with many thanks, and looking forward to seeing you soon, I am

Sincerely yours,  
*Cecilia Razovsky Davidson*  
Cecilia Razovsky Davidson

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