

WOMEN'S NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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FROM: LR. SCHWARZ'S OFFICE

TO: MR. HEHLE

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JWP

I have had a call from May Craig, president of the Women's National Press Club, about having you as the guest speaker at a dinner here in April. She suggested April 11 or April 25. The idea is that it would be your first Washington speech and I have promised to do what I could to see that you not only accepted the invitation for one of those dates, but that you would accept no earlier ones in Washington.

For your information it is only the "most important" people for whom the Press Club throws dinner meetings. So I want you to know that you are being honored, from the club's point of view.

I asked May if it would be satisfactory if you made a talk mostly off-the-record and she said she would prefer that, provided you gave a little something on-the-record that could be used for news stories.

I have said I would try to give her your answer today. As Press Club publicity chairman, I would handle the advance publicity.

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OUTLINE OF SPEECH TO BE GIVEN BY JOHN W. PEHLE, EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR OF THE WAR REFUGEE BOARD, BEFORE THE WOMEN'S
NATIONAL PRESS CLUB AT THE WILLARD HOTEL, WASHINGTON, AT
7 P.M., APRIL 11, 1944.

I. Introduction

In a sense I feel like a pariah tonight, for I am here with a story which, in part, your readers cannot yet be told. However, I promise you this. What can be told will be strictly accurate. It will be the truth.

For Government to tell the strict truth to the people is, in my mind, essential to the success of our democratic process. It is my job to tell the truth; it is yours to tell the people. That applies to what our Government does here at home. Even with respect to our Government's dealings with other governments, it is essential that whatever information it is possible to give out be strictly accurate and forthright.

I want to talk with complete candor and will do so as far as possible. Two reasons why I must withhold some of the facts. First, a natural disinclination to count our chickens before they are hatched. Second, too much candor might hinder operations.

II. The Board and its assignment

A. As you all know, the War Refugee Board was created by the President's executive order of January 22. It was an unusual order, clearly stating the Government's policy in this field and carrying a strong directive. Board members -- Hull, Morgenthau, and Stimson: three top cabinet officers. The Board was charged with carrying out the policy of the U. S. "to take all measures within its power to rescue victims of enemy oppression who are in imminent danger of death and otherwise to afford those victims all possible relief and assistance consistent with the successful prosecution of the war."

B. Administration

One of the rewards of Government service is the opportunity to see one's own ideas of how democracy should work actually operate. This is especially true in the whole field of administration. I have some thoughts on administration which will serve to point up what the War Refugee Board can and cannot be expected to do.

A Government agency, particularly an emergency agency, must clearly define its objectives. They must be as precise and limited as possible. The President's executive order gave the War Refugee Board a clear and concise statement of objectives. It directed it to perform a plain and simple life-saving job. I am determined that the Board shall not take on other functions and thereby neglect the all-important one of saving lives. We are an emergency agency and we are going to act like one. We are not going to succumb to the temptation of taking on other tasks such as looking after refugees who are already rescued, e. g. several million ~~refugees~~ in Russia *more than a*

particularly in war times,
A Government agency should operate with as small a staff as possible commensurate with the size of the job. Wherever possible the War Refugee Board is using the personnel and facilities of other Government departments (notably State, Treasury and War) to avoid duplicating and overlapping. We have 25 full-time professional employees, vitally concerned with the work they are doing. We recognize that the rescue job is too big to be done by any one group alone; consequently we are directing our efforts toward channeling, stimulating, and expediting the work of other groups, public and private, instead of trying to dominate and control the whole field ourselves.

We are cooperating with and learning as much as possible from other groups that have had previous experience in the refugee field. Many practical and feasible ideas submitted. Conferences with leaders. Suggestions being carried out.

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To perform successfully in the refugee field it is essential to have the full cooperation of the State Department and the foreign service. ~~the State Department and the foreign service~~. To aid us in our task, at the outset all U. S. diplomats and consular officers were sent clear and unmistakable instructions "to do everything possible to effectuate this Government's policy as announced by the President, bearing in mind the urgency of the problem."

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The War Refugee Board is directly responsible and accountable to the President and instructed to work with UNRRA, Intergovernmental Committee, and other appropriate international organizations.

In rescue work we are using all methods -- formal and informal, direct and indirect, conventional and unconventional -- not routine; humanitarian. All of these methods have as their goal the rescue of human beings, particularly Jews, from the barbarism of the enemy.

C. Policies

Board not concerned with seeking out and rescuing specific individuals. It is concerned with saving masses of lives.

As I have said, we are not concerned with refugees already rescued, except as they may interfere with the rescue of others.

Board is asking other governments to take parallel action. U. S. must lead. No desire to act unilaterally.

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D. Examples of Activity

I am sure the question uppermost in your minds is: What are we doing? Of that I shall tell you what I can on the record.

Through ~~diplomatic~~ channels, ^{available to our foreign missions} satellites have been warned that they will be well-advised in their own interests to take advantage of such opportunities as may be available to them in the future to permit refugees to depart across their borders into territories of any neutral countries which may be prepared to receive them. They have been told that U. S. Government views with great seriousness any continuation of policies of persecution, and holds them responsible. Particularly strong pressure has been placed upon Rumania to bring back from Transnistria (explain where it is) the large number of Jewish refugees which had been shipped to that area. Directly as a result of the pressure exerted by the War Refugee Board over 40,000 refugees have recently been brought back from Transnistria.

We are working through neutral channels to halt satellites from deporting Jews to Poland and bringing pressure to assist persecuted people's escape.

I am trying to announce the appointment of Ivar E. Olsson as the Swedish Special Representative in Stockholm, Sweden.

We have arranged for special representatives with diplomatic status. Ira Hirschmann, our man-on-the-spot in Ankara, Turkey, vice-president of Bloomingdale's. Others to be appointed soon. ~~in Switzerland and Sweden.~~ Transportation big problem in Turkey. Balkan refugees could get through Turkey. Possibility of rescuing many of the hunted in Bulgaria and Rumania through Constanza and the Black Sea. We have opened up some evacuation routes in Balkans. Mr. Hirschmann has been breaking up some transportation bottle necks. Obtaining the necessary ships in Black Sea waters under present conditions is a most difficult job involving permission of the Turkish or other neutral government providing the ship, safe conduct from all the belligerent powers and an intricate mass of shipping details.

Many obstacles have been overcome by the Board and by Mr. Hirschmann despite the importance of shipping to our military efforts. Word from Istanbul that 239 Jewish refugees transferred March 31 at Istanbul from ship directly to train destined for Palestine.

MORE ABOUT SHIPPING OFF THE RECORD.

We are pressing neutrals to open way for flow of refugees from occupied areas, to relax border controls, and announce willingness to accept refugees. We have indicated that we will arrange for maintenance of refugees and for their transportation to temporary havens. Several actual evacuation operations going on. Projects under auspices of private agencies under way.

Cooperation with Neutrals

Swedish Government was helpful in assisting most of Jewish population of Denmark to escape to Sweden.

Swiss Government has been similarly helpful in rescuing refugees and in giving humane treatment to the thousands who have sought asylum within its borders.

Spain should serve as a reservoir to be filled from time to time and emptied. Problem there is three-fold: getting people in, helping support those who are in, and getting those who are in to leave so more can come in. If we allow many refugees to accumulate in Spain, the Spanish authorities at the border will be less willing to allow refugees to come in, e.g. Sephardic Jews.

Spain is one of the two most important outlets remaining in Europe. In view of military developments in the Balkans, Spain may be the sole remaining outlet. It is therefore essential that

the full and unstinting cooperation of the Spanish Government be obtained.

Turkish Government has authorized transit visas for Jewish refugees en route to Palestine, but only a fraction used due to obstacles to their departure from Axis-occupied territory. First groups of Jewish children evacuated from Bulgaria have arrived in Palestine. Beginning of a continuous movement.

On the Psychological Front

Heavy ammunition on the psychological front was the President's ringing warning of March 22 to Germany and her satellites of the consequences of further persecutions of the Jews. It stated that "this Government will use all means at its command to aid the escape of all victims of the Nazi and Jap executioner -- regardless of race or religion or color." This heavily underscored the work OWI had previously done in the field of psychological warfare. Timely because of Hungarian and Rumanian situation. Everything being done we know of to do.

Through the radio facilities of OWI, the British Broadcasting Company, United Nations Radio in Algiers, Radio France, and the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs the President's statement was carried in news and feature shows to every country in all major languages. At the same time via the State Department our missions were instructed to cooperate with OWI to give the declaration the utmost publicity particularly in German-controlled Europe. From scattered reports that have come in so far, the missions have done a good job. Newspapers in Lisbon and Algiers and Turkey carried favorable editorials and featured the story on Page One. Our mission in Bern saw to it that the statement appeared in over 100 Swiss newspapers.

~~Clandestine tracts also were printed in Switzerland and distributed across the borders. From Algiers a press release was radioed to Naples, Bari, Tunis, Palermo, Sardinia and forward points.~~

The President's statement was followed by a widely-publicized British endorsement. On March 30 Foreign Secretary Eden told Commons that persons among Germany's satellites who show mercy to the Jews will be remembered when Germany is defeated. On the same day the Greek Prime Minister in Cairo addressed a request to his people that they take particular notice of the President's recommendation that the Allied Balkan peoples help in the rescue and escape of the Jews. This statement and the President's used in broadcasting to Greeks over the Egyptian State broadcasting station.

← IV. Finances

Money is being sent abroad thanks to Treasury's decision to lift restrictions in the Trading with the Enemy Act both with communications with enemy territory and financial transactions with enemy territory to extent necessary to aid the War Refugee Board.

Finances no problem for the War Refugee Board. No project has failed to go forward for lack of funds. Magnitude of no project under consideration has been limited by lack of funds. When and if more funds are needed, we know they will be available from public or private sources.

For obvious reasons available private funds are used first. They may be had quickly. There is flexibility in their use. To effectuate rapid service they possess great advantage. But if saving lives calls for more funds from public sources, these, too, I am sure can be found.

← V. Obstacles

~~OFF THE RECORD Two principal handicaps to the work of the War Refugee Board. The first is in Spain. I have told you something of the strategic importance of Spain geographically. DISCUSSION OFF THE RECORD~~

~~The second handicap is the difficult and hypocritical position in which we find ourselves in urging other countries to do things when those countries feel that we haven't done too much ourselves. We have not taken too many refugees into this country. Security checks. Difficulty involves the whole questions of anti-Semitism. I believe that if the problem were properly presented, people interested in humanitarian causes might be willing to allow more refugees to come in on the condition that they be kept in camps and returned to their own countries later. Attitude of Latin-American countries have indicated that in general they are prepared to do what we are prepared to do.~~

VI. Conclusion

You see why the War Refugee Board's assignment is no simple one. It is no easier because one day's changes in the military situation can undo weeks of work in perfecting rescue programs, e. g. recent events in Balkans.

Our record must be judged in terms of how much has been done that can be done. That is difficult for people on the outside to do. We are grappling with a great human problem. It must be solved in the shortest possible time. We are not satisfied with what we have done. I suspect we never shall be. But I can assure you that we are making progress.

Director
ON THE RECORD - Sir Herbert Emerson of The Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees arrived in Washington this ^{afternoon} to discuss the relations of the Committee and The War Refugee Board.