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# IN BELGIUM UNDER GERMAN RULE.

ONE MEAL A DAY.

**"Wholesale starvation if  
food supplies are stopped."**

## THE AGONY OF BELGIUM.

*Reprinted from the "Birmingham Post" of February 29th, 1916.*

"There would be wholesale starvation in Belgium within three or four weeks if the importation of food were stopped." With these arresting words Mr. F. C. Walcott, an American citizen, who has been investigating on behalf of the Rockefeller Foundation the work of the Neutral Commission for Relief, commences a report, of which we give a summary in another column. And we fail to see how his restrained account of the sufferings of the Belgian population can be read without it going home to the understanding of all that those words convey no more than the truth. Such an appeal to the understanding must go also to the heart which is not German, for has not that brave little nation endured enough on account of its fidelity? For more than a year and a half its people have been deprived of all means of livelihood; a thrifty and industrious race largely supporting itself by intensive cultivation of the soil, deprived of its sources of sustenance daily stares starvation in the face with heroic fortitude. The wail of a stricken population has not gone unheard. From this country, from France, from the neutral countries food has gone to meet its needs; but all that has been done merely meets the irreducible minimum. Of the seven million of people nearly one-half are destitute. Among those who wait in lines each day for a ration of bread and soup are many of the middle class who cannot do without this supplement to the supply they are able to secure with such means as they have. The Neutral Relief Commission have done a noble work in administering to the wants of the needy to the best of their ability. They have done it sympathetically and with discrimination; and they make it clear that far from being any diminution of requirement there is an increase; further, there must be no relaxation of supply for a long time to come, even after peace has been restored. It is gratifying to know that the funds raised in this country have been of great service. Here, as elsewhere, the flow of help perhaps would have been freer but for the belief that the merciless invader found ways of pilfering the supplies, of appropriating to his own use what was meant for the victims of his oppression. If that were really the case, the most solicitous desire to succour the Belgian sufferers inevitably would experience impediment in fulfilment. But we are glad to learn, on the authority of the Neutral Commission, supported by the independent investigations of Mr. Walcott, that there is no warrant for the allegation that Germany is benefited by the supplies sent to Belgium. Yet, it must be confessed, reports to the contrary have invited credence, the more so that the enemy has proved himself capable of any form of despicable and inhuman conduct. No valid reason, however, is there for thinking the Commission are not in a position to learn the full truth; and having their assurance that help reaches those for whom it is meant, the generous giver in this country need put no restraint upon his eager wish to respond to such a compelling appeal."

*All contributions for the people in Belgium should be sent to the National Committee for Relief in Belgium, Trafalgar Buildings, Trafalgar Square, London, W.C., or to Local Committees where they exist.*

# What it Really Means to Live in Belgium.

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*A remarkable interview with a representative of the Rockefeller Foundation, reprinted from the leading English Newspapers of February 29th, 1916.*

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“THERE would be wholesale starvation within three or four weeks if the importation of food into Belgium were stopped.”

That is the carefully considered opinion of Mr. F. C. Walcott, a well-known American, who has arrived in London from Belgium, where he went at the request of the Rockefeller Foundation to investigate the work of the Neutral Commission for Relief, of which Mr. Herbert Hoover is Chairman. The Rockefeller Foundation—the most richly endowed philanthropic institution in the United States—before contributing any further sums for the benefit of the seven million civilians in that part of Belgium occupied by the Germans, desired an independent report from their own representative. The German authorities allowed Mr. Walcott to go wherever he liked, and under these exceptional circumstances he spent three weeks visiting the more thickly populated districts in Belgium and Northern France.

Mr. Walcott has now reported to the Rockefeller Foundation that he was much impressed by the efficiency of the relief work. He has recommended that any money intended for the people in Belgium should be entrusted to the Neutral Commission. The British National Committee for Relief in Belgium, of which the Lord Mayor of London is Chairman, works, with the approval of His Majesty's Government, in co-operation with Mr. Hoover's Neutral Commission.

"If any of those who cavil at sending relief supplies into Belgium could only visit Belgium," said Mr. Walcott yesterday, "and could see personally the plight of the suffering people, they would come back as eager for the continuance of this relief work as I now am.

"It is difficult for anyone getting three ample meals a day, with plenty of fuel in the house, and living even in moderate luxury, to comprehend what it means suddenly to be reduced to existing on one meal a day.

### WAITING IN THE RAIN FOR FOOD.

"That one meal in Belgium consists of 300 grammes of bread—which is the equivalent of three medium-sized breakfast rolls or three thick slices of bread—and one half-litre—approximately one pint—of soup, made chiefly from vegetables. Of the seven millions in Belgium three millions are practically destitute, and they have to stand in line from one to three hours a day for this pittance of food. The depots for distribution are generally only large enough to accommodate between 30 and 50 people at a time, so long queues of the hungry extend into the street for a hundred yards or more. Most of those who wait are so poor that they have no protection, in the shape of an umbrella or a thick coat, against the discomfort of stormy days.

"In the cities of Belgium I have recently seen thousands of people lined up in the snow, or rain-soaked and chilly, waiting for bread and soup. I have returned to some of the distributing stations at the end of the day and have often found many men, women and children, still standing in line, but as the doors were then closed, they were compelled to go back to their pitiful homes, cold, wet and miserable. It was not until 18 weary hours afterwards that they got the meal they missed.

"Almost one-half of the population of Belgium, which has been deprived of all industry for nearly a year-and-a-half, have been reduced to this existence of daily waiting in line for a starvation ration.

### THE MISERY OF THE CHILDREN.

"There is another stratum of society, the middle class, just above the poorer working people, which is only partially destitute; but even these must swallow their pride and stand in the long lines every day for a supplementary ration of food, for their means do not enable them to buy enough to keep body and soul together. Many of them are mothers and fathers who have children only partly nourished. When they go home without even the daily ration, as occasionally happens, the suffering becomes pathetically acute.

"Then, too, picture to yourself the mental condition of a people who have been without work for more than a year-and-a-half who have daily been face to face with the possibility of starvation, and who are cut off from all communication with the outside world by the barbed wire and armed cordons of a conquering foreign army. In every Belgian city, once a fortnight, the bulletin boards are placarded with bright pink paper—the German 'affiche'—on which the Belgians can read the names of their fellow-countrymen and women who have been sentenced to imprisonment, for terms varying from a year to a life-time on account of offences committed against German rule. And, on top of all this the majority of the Belgians cannot help realising, always keenly, sometimes bitterly, that they are 'objects of charity.'

"As to the work of the Neutral Commission, I began by studying the records and personnel of that organisation at its head office in London. I became thoroughly convinced that the organisation here is unusually efficient and extremely businesslike in its methods under the direction of Mr. Herbert Hoover, the Chairman, who has real genius for organisation and a soul charged with the spirit of relieving the horrors of the war.

## NO STEALING BY THE GERMANS.

"When I arrived in Belgium I found the same intense zeal for helping the unfortunate and the same remarkable efficiency in all branches of the Commission: at the docks in Rotterdam, in the transhipment of supplies to barges and through the canals to the thousands of local Belgian Committees, in fact, through all the various channels of relief—from the barge to the consumer. All the American delegates, and many of the office forces throughout Belgium and Northern France, give their services without any recompense whatsoever. The result of this voluntary work is that there are practically no 'overhead' charges, and that the foodstuffs, which are well purchased, cost less to the Belgian consumer than would be paid in Paris, London or New York. In other words, the money contributed yields the maximum amount of relief.

"A few well-fed people outside of Belgium sometimes hint that the Belgians are getting more relief than they need, and that Germany is benefiting, either directly or indirectly, or both, because the British nation allows bare living supplies, for the nation for whom they went to war, to go through the blockade. As regards the first point, expert neutral dietitians, who have been permitted to visit Belgium, are unanimous in stating that the food doled out to these three million destitute Belgians constitutes the irreducible minimum living ration. As regards the suggestion that Germany is in any way benefiting, the whole question has been very thoroughly and impartially investigated by the Neutral Commission, and their report fully and conclusively and, to my mind, definitely proves that there is no stealing of supplies by the Germans.

## "IF SUPPLIES WERE STOPPED!"

"I do not think it is quite realised here that many German authorities openly state that if relief supplies were stopped going into Belgium the Germans would then be able to take many Belgian workmen into Germany where, in munition works and factories, they could release German workmen for fighting.

"It would, of course, be improper for me to express any opinion as to the correctness of this German view. I merely mention it because this aspect of the case does not seem to have presented itself to the public in England. I can say, however, that in providing these relief supplies and permitting them to go through the blockade to be distributed under the vigilant eye of the Neutral Commission, the British people have undertaken a work that is not only humanitarian and consonant with the loyalty naturally expected between Allies, but also is very practical.

### THE NEED IS GREAT.

"The conclusion I have arrived at—and I went to Belgium with a perfectly open mind to report to the Rockefeller Foundation, which has no connection whatever with Mr. Hoover's organisation—is that the need is great both for food and clothing in Belgium. **There would be wholesale starvation within two or three weeks if the importation of food into Belgium were stopped.** The need will continue to be great many months after peace is declared. Factories have been stripped of machinery and there is complete stagnation of industry in Belgium. It will take months to rehabilitate these industries and start the wheels again. Almost any amount of money that can be donated can be immediately used to the best possible advantage of the Belgians in Belgium, and I trust that the work of the British National Committee, whose benevolent assistance has been invaluable to the Neutral Relief Commission, will not be hampered by mis-statements emanating from those who have not had the opportunity of visiting Belgium since the German occupation."



## THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR RELIEF IN BELGIUM.

All money sent to the National Committee for Relief in Belgium is turned over, without any deduction whatever for expenses, to the neutral Commission, whose work Mr. Walcott describes.

The neutral Commission then purchases cargoes of food which are sent to Rotterdam. From there they go into Belgium by barge or goods train under the protection of the American flag and the seal of the Commission.

In Belgium there are about 125 central warehouses under the control of the Americans; who issue to 4,000 Belgian Communal Committees the supplies they need every week. These Belgian Committees re-issue the food to Belgians. Thus the Germans never get a chance to handle the food at all.

There are three millions destitute who are daily in receipt, in this way, of total or partial relief. Over 750,000 of these are trade unionists.

The Relief Commission publishes a report showing every penny received and every pound of food bought. They also publish accounts from the Belgian Communes showing that all the food sent into Belgium has reached only those for whom it was intended.

LORD ROBERT CECIL, on February 21st, 1916, in the House of Commons, stated that the Government "are satisfied with the manner in which the Relief Commission has carried on its work and have exacted guarantees from the German authorities who might otherwise have taken advantage of the supplies."

Up to February 29th, 1916, the National Committee had handed to the neutral Commission £1,400,000, collected solely from British sources, for the purchase of Belgium's food. But this is only a drop in the bucket. The National Committee must have £65,000 *every week*.

It costs 5d. a day to keep alive these Belgians who remain loyal, in spite of all persecution and temptations. Will you help? The Germans refuse to feed them.

Contributions urgently needed should be sent to A. Shirley Benn, Esq., M.P., Hon. Treasurer, National Committee for Relief in Belgium, Trafalgar Buildings, Trafalgar Square, London, W.C., or to Local Committees where they have been formed.