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Dear Dr. Compton:

At the meeting of the Trustees of The Rockefeller Foundation on December 1, I reported the circumstances which led up to your letter of November 20; and a copy of your letter was given to all the Trustees present. Following the discussion, which lasted for nearly an hour, I was instructed to prepare, in consultation with the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, a reply to your comments. The present letter is an attempt to carry out those instructions, in so far as the limitations of a letter permit.

It seems to me that the first sentence in your second paragraph is based on a misapprehension. You say: "As I understand it, the Executive Committee decided that emergency war projects could be considered only if they fitted into the 'approved program' of the Foundation." This implies an inflexible program and a degree of rigidity which have never at any time characterized the Foundation's work. The officers have never been asked by the Trustees to apply an automatic rule which keeps us from examining the merits of a particular proposal. If you gained a contrary impression from our long-distance telephone conversation, I can only say that it was a mistaken impression, due either to the bad connection which we had or to some ineptness on my part.

I would describe our policy in this fashion: In principle we frankly give preference to items which are related to our program, but

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this preference does not preclude the consideration of exceptions which because of their high importance and special appropriateness constitute a unique claim.

The Trustees and the Executive Committee have reaffirmed more than once the principle expressed by Dr. Wilbur that "in periods of stress and war . . . the particular function of the Foundation is to keep alive as many of its intellectual and cultural interests as possible." This principle was first adopted at the meeting of the Board in Williamsburg on December 5, 1939, before you became a trustee. It was reaffirmed at the meeting of the Board last April from which you were unavoidably absent. But there has always been a realization that the principle had to be kept flexible, and that we must be free to do what seems wise and best at the moment.

There is no disposition whatever to quarrel with your statement as to "our moral responsibility to assist in this emergency." As I said in that pamphlet on the war work of The Rockefeller Foundation which I sent you the other day: "In such a cataclysm as we now face there is no cloistered retreat, no ivory tower, to which any group or individual can escape. We are all of us in the war and it is idle to pretend that business can proceed as usual. It is inevitable, therefore, that a substantial proportion of the appropriations of The Rockefeller Foundation should have some relationship to the present emergency."

But this does not mean that it is always possible to give a favorable answer to every request we receive that is related to the war effort. For example, ever since the war started we have had many requests from governmental and semi-governmental agencies asking for emergency aid,

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two or three of them almost identical with the one you presented recently. Some of these requests involved substantial sums; some of them seemed to us relatively unimportant; some would have led us into fields where we had no wish or competence to go; some were able to secure aid from federal sources and did not in the end need our assistance; some we have helped. I do not think we can be fairly criticized because of our attempt to exercise a selective judgment. And I frankly do not agree with the thesis that as a general principal ^{et} our funds should be used to facilitate actions that are handicapped by governmental regulations or faulty legislation. If we attempted to do that on any consistent scale, we would come to the end of the war with no funds left.

The Rockefeller Foundation is in this war right up to the hilt, and the Trustees are proud of the role which the organization is playing. Our war commission on public health is operating all the way from China and India to North Africa. Fourteen of our doctors are in the armed services where they occupy key positions in the fight on malaria and typhus. Our yellow-fever vaccine has been used to immunize all the Allied Armies. In the epidemic of influenza which now threatens the troops here and in England it is the vaccine from our laboratory that holds out the brightest hope. Our Vice-President, Mr. Gunn, is serving as Director of Personnel for UNRRA. Mr. Weayer's work with the NDRC you are well acquainted with. In your own field we have made emergency war grants to complete Lawrence's cyclotron, for the related work at Chicago, for the American Institute of Physics, for applied mathematics at Brown, and for half a dozen other projects that I could mention. Every division of the Foundation has made contributions of skill and money, each in the way most appropriate to its own line of work.

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The Trustees are proud of this record, and they are proud, too, of the steadfast purpose with which, both by present actions and by future plans, we are maintaining emphasis on our major opportunity - the preserving and the upbuilding of those intellectual resources which, throughout and beyond all wars, furnish the basis of hope for a civilization worth fighting for.

Very cordially yours,

RAYMOND B. FOSDICK

Dr. Karl T. Compton
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Cambridge
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BBF DBF

c.c. to Mr. Walter W. Stewart