

DRAFT

“The Moral Challenge of Abundance”: Humanitarianism and the Rise of the Food Aid  
Complex After World War II

Susan Levine, University of Illinois at Chicago

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A Note to readers:

This paper is part of a larger project on the relationship between humanitarian agencies and state-based geopolitics – with particular emphasis on food aid.. I take food to be a central factor in the social, political, and economic shape of twentieth century global relations. My ultimate aim is to explore food aid from the late nineteenth century Indian famines through Herbert Hoover’s World War I efforts and end with the UN’s Freedom From Hunger campaign in the 1960s. As you will see, this paper forms the work’s center, and probably its heart – the period of World War II through the passage in the of PL480, the legislation that established US food aid and formed the basis for ‘Food for Peace.’ I have become more and more intrigued by the immediate post-World War II moment as both governments and the private sector began to re-build, or in this case, build, new modes of dealing with food and hunger. This is a work-in-progress and an early draft so I look forward to your comments. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Reference abbreviations: CARE: CARE Archives, New York Public Library; Oxfam: Oxfam Archives, Bodleian Library, Oxford UK; HST: Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO; FFF: Food for Freedom Papers, Library of Congress; MDL: Murray D. Lincoln Papers, Nationwide Insurance Co, Columbus, Ohio; French Diary: Paul Comly French Diary, Swarthmore College Peace Collection; FAO Food and Agriculture Organization Archives, Rome, Italy.

The winter of 1946-47 was predicted to be the worst Europe had seen since 1880. Coming on the heels of the continent's brutal wartime destruction, military as well as civilian leaders braced for disaster. Agricultural production in many areas was practically non-existent. Reports of food shortages filled official communiqués and the press as well. Economists feared the breakdown of markets – the black market already did a healthy business in most areas. Doctors warned that malnutrition would threaten the next generation of European leaders. Reports of widespread hunger and famine began to filter across the Atlantic to an American public that had been largely insulated from the war's hardships. *The New York Times* warned that the "outlook for coming winter is dark for most of Europe." Reserves of food, the paper reported are lower than during the war itself. *The Washington Post* predicted "hunger and privation" in Greece, Belgium, Yugoslavia, and, most notably, in Germany. Herbert Hoover, sent by President Truman to survey the situation in Europe reported "a serious situation in food still exists." Even the British, who had seen their own share of wartime privation, felt compelled to address Europe's pressing need for food. The newly organized Oxford Famine Relief Committee predicted, "the winter is not over and cold may bring catastrophic results among populations...[who] are reduced to rations which only provide only half the minimum of food required."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> NYT December 1, 1946; Washington Post September 28, 1947. HST to Herbert Hoover, January 18, 1947, HST 3. M. Emile Cammaerts to "The New Statesman and Nation," January 22, 1944, Oxfam SPC 1/1-3 - 1/1/2

The creation of an international food aid system after World War II marked the high ideals and at the same time the very real limits of twentieth century liberal internationalism. If we take seriously the goals of the architects of postwar relief agencies like CARE, Oxfam, and even the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), we must understand the context in which these international organizations were built. The work of postwar relief was shaped by the devastation of war, the urgent need to get food and supplies to starving people, and a determination to build a world in which the horrors and destruction of war would never again be allowed to occur. But the work also fed, if you will, the increasingly aggressive geopolitical contest of the Cold War. Leaders of organizations like CARE, Oxfam, and FAO, devised a truly remarkable system of global food and development aid that took as its mission the realization of democracy and fulfillment of the human potential across the globe. The system was also intimately tied to national and international agricultural markets and relied on governments for resources and support. It was the unacknowledged link between aid agencies and state policies that ultimately challenged the efficacy of international food aid itself.

Exploring the origins of international food aid brings together a number of literatures that are generally unrelated, namely, the histories of humanitarianism, agriculture, and the Cold War. Studies of humanitarianism began to flourish in the 1980s. The literature is generally divided between technocratic reports and evaluations of specific projects and more general critiques of humanitarian aid as an inadequate, if not harmful path to ending hunger and poverty. New fields of

emergency/disaster studies have appeared alongside increasingly skeptical, sometimes scathing, critiques of NGOs and the very idea of humanitarianism itself. In this view, food aid in particular and development aid, in general are variously seen as distorting locally sustainable ways of life, creating dependence, and imposing western beliefs in science and technology on problems without taking into account other indigenous or historical alternatives. Another trend points to the growth of an aid “industry,” in which organizations perpetuate conditions of crisis and need in order to justify their own existence and enhance their appeal to donors. One strand of the later that is particularly relevant to the subject of this paper is the professionalization of aid work and emergence of new generations of “first world” men and women drawn into the aid nexus for idealistic as well as careerist interests. In sum, the critique asserts that postwar relief resulted in the growth of an NGO relief and development “industry” that has become self-perpetuating in the context of persistent global poverty, hunger, and war emergencies.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cmiel, “The Recent History of Human Rights,” *American Historical Review*, February 2004, 117-135...eg, Edkins, DeWaal, Clapp, Barrett. Also Linden, “The Alms Race,” Marne, “The Road to Hell”, Reiff, “A Bed for the Night.” Other works: Samantha Power; older works: Himmelfarb, Vernon, Davis., Cullather. Special issue of *Journal of Modern European History* “Ideas, Practices, and Histories of Humanitarianism; Histories of Humanitarianism conference. Cathie “It would be naïve to assume that food aid has as its major purpose the alleviation of hunger and poverty.” Also Questions about efficacy of US food aid, esp after 1954 – Janet E. Kodrus, “Shifting Global Strategies of U.S. Foreign Food Aid, 1955-1990,” *Political Geography*: “Those favored by US food assistance tend to be pivotal states within a regional theater of conflict regardless of the incidence of hunger or the ability of the local economy to absorb these commodities.”, Christopher R. Barrett, “Food aid: Is it Development Assistance, Trade Promotion, Both or Neither?” *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*; T.N. Srinivasan, “Food Aid: A cause of development failure or an instrument for success?” *World Bank Economic Review*; Peter Wallenstein, “Scarce Goods as Political Weapons: The Case of Food,” *Journal of Peace Research*.

The expansion of food aid organizations has been also, and intimately, linked to the trajectory of postwar agricultural systems. On the one hand, food aid became part of national and international debates about the regulation of agricultural markets commodity production, and trade. The FAO, in particular, sought to establish a global “Department of Agriculture” that would protect local farmers, ensure price levels, and provide favorable conditions for international trade.<sup>4</sup> This vision was based on the promise that modern science and technology held out for the hope of eliminating hunger as a human condition. Like the critics of humanitarianism, recent work has brought ideas about science and technology under closer scrutiny. In particular, critics question the “high modernism” of agricultural development which favored large-scale farms, mechanization, and the use of chemicals to boost mono-culture and productivity, pushed smaller farmers out business and skewed local markets. US domestic agricultural policies, in particular, created a huge store of “surplus” commodities while exporting high modernist farming practices abroad.. The question is whether science and technology have provided paths toward human betterment or, rather, have methods of production and distribution that ultimately spurred uneven development and exacerbated dependency, all for the benefit of American corporate food and farming interests.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> A Global New Deal – need.

<sup>5</sup> (Sen, Cullather, new foodstudies looks at foodways but not so much at ag systems.) Ag history: Matusow, Field, Ruttan, Cathie, Schapsmeier and Schapsmeier.

On closer examination, however, we can see that postwar food aid architects were, however, high modernists of a particular type. The leaders of CARE and FAO, most notably, believed in scientific farming but they also came out of the cooperative movement. That set them apart in important ways from the mainstream of agricultural bloc advocates in significant ways particularly with regard to market regulations and the role of the state. While the cooperative movement did not question private property, it did question the unmediated market. As CARE's first president, Murray D. Lincoln put it, cooperatives represented "a form of economic democracy which supports political democracy."<sup>6</sup> In Lincoln's view, cooperatives represented a more democratic market system that felt an obligation to small producers even as they promoted scientific methods. Cooperation also meant that the surplus posed a not only an economic problem but a moral imperative to use America's productive capacity for global good.

Finally, the development of an international food aid system is inextricably linked to the development of the Cold War, first in Europe, notably Germany, and then in Asia, Africa, and Latin American as well. Most Cold War literature focuses on the geopolitical strategies and goals of US and Soviet leaders. Until recently, however, few focused on the use of food as a central element in those strategies. While acknowledging that a key element in the Marshall Plan, for example, was its food-aid provisions, scholars have paid little attention has been paid to the subsequent role

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<sup>6</sup> MDL, Vice President in Charge of Revolution, as told to David Karp, New York: McGraw-Hill (1982), 188. Despite the title of his memoir, Lincoln denied that the cooperative movement was "leftist" or intended primarily for poor people.

of voluntary organizations which, in partnership with state agencies, built both official and unofficial relationships across the globe. The dependence of aid organizations on USDA surplus, in particular, tied relief workers into an increasingly complicated and relation to governments and often stymied their desire to represent “person-to-person” aid.<sup>7</sup>

My aim in this paper is to look at international food aid through all three lenses. My key concern is how and why humanitarian ideals became increasingly tied to geopolitical concerns. This is, of course, a big question. More specifically, I want to look at the ways that relief efforts in the immediate post-war European emergency transformed into a much larger, global food aid system and how the architects of aid organizations viewed this change. That is, how did the men (and it was mostly men) leading these organizations understand their work and their historic moment. In the wake of the devastation of Europe, how did ideas about the “moral challenge of abundance” and a determination to eliminate hunger and realize “human potential” on a global scale, end up with a logic of institution building? Why did organizations that considered themselves modern, charitable “businesses” become closely tied to government resources and policies? Perhaps, in the end, the question is, what were the unintended results of postwar dreams of creating a new world order based on democracy and abundance?

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<sup>7</sup> Cite on Marshall Plan and URRRA: Shepherd, Hogan, UNRRA, Snyder’s latest....

### **The urgent question of European relief : Food as a bulwark against social disorder**

At the end of the war, the international network of relief agencies faced an urgent crisis in Europe. As reports of hunger leaked out of the war zones, relief agencies appealed especially to the American and British publics to come to the aid of their European cousins. The situation in Europe, they feared, posed an immediate threat to the newly secured peace and a long-term threat to the strength of democratic institutions. Some worried that without food relief Europe would fall back into the chaos of fascism. Anna Lourd Straus, president of League of Women Voters, predicted that, "if steps are not immediately taken to prevent starvation in Europe there is a real possibility of an upsurge of fascism..."<sup>8</sup> Others worried that the world could easily fall back into a state of perpetual war. Mary Woolley, former president of the American Association of University Women and long-time advocate for world peace, insisted that food would be a key factor in preventing the return of war.<sup>9</sup> Even before the war ended, Woolley suggested that young people training for relief work would be "particular representatives of our American way of life and of internationalism." They would, she said, "be in a position to establish outposts for freedom at a time when the world will need the maximum of constructive cooperation and unselfish example." For civilian planners, food relief held the best promise of averting renewed chaos in Europe and ensuring a democratic future.

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<sup>8</sup> HST Truman 2

<sup>9</sup> FFF 1943.



Murray Lincoln observed, “people reach first for the bread box- and they do it before they reach for the bullet box, or even the ballot box.”<sup>10</sup> For him, the politics of hunger spoke a universal language. “Hunger’s symbols,” he said, “have always been the demand for peace, bread, and land.” Food, he believed, “can be the means by which we change insecurity to security – war to peace - and bloody revolution to peaceful attainment of great needs.”<sup>11 12</sup> Paul Comly French, Executive Director of CARE , observing the jockeying for influence already characterizing postwar reconstruction, sorrowfully wrote, “It is all so tragic to think that human beings are so unwilling to make any of the sacrifices necessary for real peace...” At one point, French went so far as to speculate, “perhaps man must use the atomic bomb on a large scale and really destroy our present civilization before he learns hat war will never solve the problems of the world.”<sup>13</sup>

Even before the war ended, the contest between the Soviet Union and the United States for influence and power on the continent marked reconstruction and rehabilitation plans. In the US and Britain, especially, postwar planners from governments as well as voluntary associations worried that widespread hunger would cause massive social disruptions and open the doors for increased Soviet influence. Countering Soviet influence became an increasingly important focus of official US policy, most notably with the Marshall Plan. The Marshall Plan, was centrally predicated on the assumption that rebuilding Germany would be the key

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<sup>10</sup> MDL Address April 12, 1956.

<sup>11</sup> “To My Way of Thinking,” MDL nd.

<sup>12</sup> Woolley to Weston March 24, 1942, FFF

<sup>13</sup> French diary August 17, 19, 1946.

to post-war American influence in Europe. A key element of that plan was to restore agricultural production, establish markets, and ensure sufficient food to the population in the Western zones. "The use of food on the international front," predicted Harold Weston, head of Food for Freedom, an organization formed to build domestic support for the UN and UNRRA, ""will be a large factor in determining the nature of the world to emerge after the war."<sup>14</sup> Returning from a survey of the European food situation after the war, Herbert Hoover warned President Truman, "whoever controls these commodities during the next year would actually rule the respective countries."<sup>15</sup>

American, and to a lesser extend British, food aid agencies shared their governments' concerns about Soviet aims. The leaders of CARE, in particular, saw themselves as "person to person" representatives of American democratic values and worked closely with government officials to make sure Europeans knew where their aid was coming from. CARE, for example, carefully labeled its packages "Donated by the USA," and Paul Comly French advised the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Administrator, Milo Perkins, that the Us should do the same. "The Communists and neutralists," he said, were using food aid to convince people that Russia "was directly responsible for improvements in their standards of living."<sup>16</sup> In fact, French reported, CARE agents in Europe, found "a definite anti-American attitude." Perkins had also heard, "well-founded rumors" that the Soviet Union

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<sup>14</sup> FFF 1943.

<sup>15</sup> HST 4

<sup>16</sup> French to Stanley Andrews December 15, 1952. CARE 27

planned to offer grain and meat from Poland and the Balkins to countries in Western Europe. Soviet aid, Perkins acknowledged, came with “a tremendous amount of propaganda designed to discredit U.S. efforts in Western Europe.” “The average housewife on the continent,” he admitted, “has only the vaguest notion of our assistance. We aren’t even imaginative enough to send millions of narrow paper wrappers to put around the long loaves of bread baked from our own wheat.” To counter this influence, Perkins advised the US State Department to adopt CARE’s model to “get the maximum awareness of U.S. aid on the part of individual recipients.”<sup>17</sup>

CARE, in particular, took its role as representative of “the American people” as a central part of its post-war mission. As French put it, CARE’s most important purpose was “general distribution to the little people across Europe who are so important in this struggle for a peaceful future.” Murray Lincoln told the socialist writer, Norman Cousins, “We are losing the propaganda battle over the world...I am increasingly impressed that those of us who believe in true democracy and our way of life, notwithstanding its faults, must somehow mobilize public opinion to correct such injustices in our scheme of things as may exist and at the same time see that right action is taken in our relation to foreign countries.”<sup>18</sup> Food aid, they agreed, represented “person to person” diplomacy. Indeed, Lincoln insisted that CARE, as a non-governmental agency, could better reach “the little people” around the world

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<sup>17</sup> Perkins November 3, 1947. CARE 27. Also Bloomstein to French re: Point IV, 1950. MDL 6:2

<sup>18</sup> Lincoln to Cousins August 23, 1950 MDL 6:2

who were suspicious of government agents – even if those groups were “financed by government funds.”<sup>19</sup> CARE, boasted Arthur Ringland, one of the organization’s founders, “is making concrete in the minds of many Europeans, the fact that America is interested in them.”<sup>20</sup> CARE, however, distinguished its own food aid efforts as fundamentally different from the Soviet’s use of food aid. Paul Comly French insisted, in fact, that democracy could not be heard by people “whose ears were deafened by the rumbling of their stomachs,” but, he added, unlike the Soviets, the US uses food “for good will, not to implement power.”<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, for CARE, food aid was the key to the future of democracy in Europe and to the creation of a new international world that could employ human ingenuity to end poverty, hunger, and war forever.

### **Building the new model charity: The business of food aid**

The food crisis in Europe presented a challenge to existing voluntary war relief agencies. . In both the United States and Britain, voluntary relief agencies had to operate under fairly strict government regulations when it came to working in foreign areas. Even within those restraints, however, few voluntary associations had the capacity to mobilize large quantities of supplies and even those like CARE who could do so were limited by the continued constraints of military occupation.

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<sup>19</sup> French to Stanley Andrews. December 15, 1952. CARE 27

<sup>20</sup> Ringland. CARE 25 AACVFA

<sup>21</sup> Note on “little people” – a commonly used phrase for “ordinary” people in Europe – then elsewhere. Need..see Harriet Friedman, “The Political Economy of Food: The Rise and Fall of the Postwar International Food Order, American Journal of Sociology. Jennifer Denton, Rethinking the 1950s: How Anti Communism and Cold War Made America Liberal.

Ships and trains that might move food were still under military control. Even if aid groups could get their agents and supplies to the continent, however, the destruction of local infrastructures hampered or even precluded timely delivery of food. Even the United Nation's newly formed UNRRA found relief work to be difficult, if not impossible in some areas.<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, however, the food crisis also opened new opportunities for voluntary organizations. In Britain even before the war ended, a small group of Oxford dons and clergy, with the support of the city's mayor, Henry Gillett, joined in the growing opposition to the government's blockade of supplies to occupied areas. Mounting what they called a "Moral Rearmament," the group insisted that Britain had a responsibility to aid its former allies on the continent. Over 400,000 people in Greece alone died of hunger, the Famine Relief Committee reported, and "dead bodies [were] placed outside houses every night." The British Government insisted in 1943-44, that since the Germans controlled the territory, it was their responsibility to feed the people, but the Oxford group urged a larger humanitarian responsibility. "We do not believe it is inevitable," their first petition stated, "that thousands of women and children in friendly countries should continue to sicken or die because of it (the blockade)."<sup>23</sup> The political protest quickly formed a charity aimed at buying food and medicines "for impoverished children in any country to

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<sup>22</sup> Shephard, Tony Judt...

<sup>23</sup> Vera Brittain, Muriel Lester, and Donald Soper to Lord Selborne, 10 Jan 1944. OxfamSpc 1/1-3, 1/1/2

which we could obtain access.”<sup>24</sup> Despite Britain’s own hardships during the war, the Oxford committee’s appeals proved surprisingly successful. Within a short time, there were famine relief committees all across the country and the Oxford committee held a “Greek Famine Relief Week,” which raised over L10,000.

The Oxford group quickly adopted an entirely new model of charity work. Instead of simply collecting donations, Oxfam, as the group called itself, operated small resale shops and used the profits to fund their relief activities. Local housewives would donate used items to the shop which Oxfam then sold for a modest profit. To get the resale shops off the ground, Cecil Jackson-Cole, one of the group’s key leaders, gathered a few “devoted” people to form a business in the City of London that would provide capital for the shops as well as business expertise in running the stores. Oxfam employed an advertising agent and claimed to be the “first ones to initiate large-scale display advertising for the charitable world.”<sup>25</sup>

In the US a similar move began to organize relief agencies on a new model. Where the Oxford group grew from academic and religious sources, the new American initiatives came from the agricultural cooperative movement as well as veterans of Herbert Hoover’s World War I American Relief Administration. Like the Oxfam founders, the Americans saw themselves as crafting a new type of charity.

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<sup>24</sup> OX Moral Rearmament

<sup>25</sup> Maggie Black, also OX Jackson Cole. The question of advertising did cause a “heated” debate among the Oxfam Executive Officers, but, according to the minutes, “It was ultimately agreed....that the procedure should be adopted.” EO 20 Feb 1948. Oxfam Gov/1/1/2/1

Jetisoning the religious or ethnic appeals of most relief agencies, the Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe, CARE, formed in 1944-45, promised a secular agency that would be run as an efficient business. Instead of resale shops, CARE modeled itself on Herbert Hoover's post-World War I food package delivery system. The agency put together food boxes (initially consisting of surplus Army rations) and sold the packages to the American public for about \$10.00. The packages were "designed scientifically to meet established dietary needs abroad," each box including meat, sugar, shortening, flour, chocolate, apricots, coffee, egg powder, milk powder and soap."<sup>26</sup> The profits from the package sales covered operations which included not only the purchase of food supplies but also the promise of timely delivery of "CARE Packages" to specified individuals or families in Europe.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, William Haskell, CARE's first Executive Director told his successor, Paul Comly French, "CARE is a business package selling organization [with] no place for the 'sob' stuff of religious agencies."<sup>28</sup> CARE staffer, Harold Bloomstein, boasted that the organization operated on "a business model with a relief purpose. He described the difference between CARE and traditional charities:

The traditional relief agency solicits funds and delivers relief (after promotion, administration, procurement expenses). The Agency takes no risk – the amount of relief is not pledged in advance. CARE sells units at individual price, delivery guaranteed or money refunded. Each unit has advertised

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<sup>26</sup> "Organization and Functions of Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe, Inc., February 15, 1947. CARE series 1. Box 24, Advisory Committee on Voluntary Foreign Aid – PWRB (Arthur Ringland) Jan 47-Dec 47.

<sup>27</sup> CARE 27. Quite soon, however, Americans began to purchase packages for unspecified individuals. This created a problem for the organization which had to shift into a more "general relief" model.

<sup>28</sup> French Diary

contents, the selling price includes managing and costs of operation.”<sup>29</sup>

Like Oxfam, CARE unabashedly advertised its services, partnering with the American Advertising Counsel and engaging in extensive print and radio campaigns to develop a “market” for CARE packages. In addition to general newspaper ads, CARE also targeted specific organizations ranging from employees of large companies like Sears Roebuck to women’s clubs, boy and girl scout troops, the League of Women Voters, and church women. Like Oxfam too, CARE’s efforts met with an enthusiastic response. Very quickly the organization’s operations expanded beyond the hopes or imaginations of its founders. By 1948, CARE sold enough packages to deliver 80,000 boxes of Christmas food to Germany, and the State Department contracted for an additional 100,000 parcels a month for the first six months of 1949.<sup>30</sup>

The new model charities crafted a new business of international food relief. Not only did they employ extensive advertising for their “product” of aid, but they also insisted that their offices reflect efficient business organization. To that end, private agencies like CARE and Oxfam as well as the UN’s newly formed Food and Agriculture Organization, favored professional staff over the traditional charity volunteer. FAO head, Norris Dodd, for example, insisted that his staff in the agency’s new Rome office be paid salaries “high enough to attract and enable us to retain

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<sup>29</sup> Bloomstein NEED page

<sup>30</sup> NEED



well-qualified staff members...”<sup>31</sup> CARE, similarly, hired Paul Comly French, veteran administrator as its second executive director at a salary of \$20,000 per year – higher than most government officials earned at the time. Board member Wallace Campbell said that the organization needed to break the traditional practice of charitable groups who kept staff salaries low so that donors would feel their gifts were going toward the needy, not to administrative costs. In the modern business of charity, Campbell said, “donors would be served better if we attracted an effective staff.”<sup>32</sup> Oxfam likewise insisted on a professional staff and efficient business operations. The organization’s early minutes, for example, highlight discussions of compensation, hours, and terms of employment, including providing a car for the director, Cecil Jackson-Cole.<sup>33</sup> Jackson-Cole himself made sure that Oxfam carefully monitored operations to ensure “financial success.” Despite an insistence that “there is a responsible spirit behind the universe seeking to remedy suffering,” he did not lessen his commitment to building an organization that combined business with charity.<sup>34</sup>

The modern business of charity did not mean that CARE or Oxfam founders eschewed religion or religious motives for their actions. Indeed, the men who led both groups articulated Christian principles as the heart of their commitment to their work. Cecil Jackson-Cole, for example, wrote, “...I have tried in this way to

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<sup>31</sup> Norris Dodd to FAO Regional Representative in Rome, 1951, FAO Dodd Outgoing Letters to FAO Staff 1951-1960 Day 3.

<sup>32</sup> Campbell 54

<sup>33</sup> Oxfam minutes, eg 24 June 1948.

<sup>34</sup> CCJ memoirs

serve my Master who gave us the injunction to feed the hungry and clothe the naked.” He added, “Please do not assume this is religiosity.” Indeed, when seeking out London businessmen to back Oxfam’s early work, Jackson-Cole specifically drew on a “team of Christian businessmen.” When asked to describe “the Oxfam spirit,” he said, “It arose out of Christianity, but it surely includes all men and women, and young people of goodwill of all religions and of none, if they have concern for this cause.” And he described Gilbert Murray as “then an Agnostic, but a godly man...”<sup>35</sup>

Paul Comly French similarly described Christian motivations for his work. As a Quaker he had worked for the War Resisters League and, during the war, headed the National Service Board for Religious Objectors. As he considered the offer to direct CARE operations he wrote, “It is all so tragic to think that human beings are unwilling to make any of the sacrifices necessary for real peace and that men are so unwilling to accept the basic laws of Christ that would lead to real brotherhood and understanding.” He lamented that “God has lost meaning to many people.” Indeed, when French first began working for CARE he found he did not like the general business attitude. “It seems curious to me,” he wrote, “to hear the discussion of sales as though it were a commercial organization, but I suppose on second thought that is just what it is.”<sup>36</sup> Indeed, he quickly adopted the sense of urgency that marks relief work. He re-organized the office, instituted more “efficient” business systems including investing in the new “Rem-Rand Machines, and began to employ key-

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<sup>35</sup> Jackson-Cole Reminiscences. Oxfam SPC 1/1/1

<sup>36</sup> French Diary

punch operators to use them.<sup>37</sup> Every day's delay in moving things in the office, he concluded, "means that much longer that someone who is hungry is without the extra food that the CARE package represents."<sup>38</sup>

### **The moral challenge of abundance**

Postwar relief agencies reflected the optimism that the new model charity – now in the business of relief – could solve world hunger, allow human potential to flourish and ensure a global democratic future. To do that, of course, required not only a professional staff and efficient operation, but access to food supplies as well. If food was the key to rebuilding democracy abroad, the United States had a distinct advantage. As the only western nation whose agricultural fields and markets had been unscathed by war, the US enjoyed an almost unprecedented abundance of basic commodities. The corn, wheat, and dairy sectors actually thrived during the war. Kept afloat by New Deal commodity supports, American farmers expanded their productive capacity during the war. In 1945 the USDA had millions of bushels of wheat, corn, soy beans in government storage facilities. The supplies only increased and by 1954 the USDA held an estimated 427 million bushels of wheat and 900 million bushels of corn in addition to dairy products and vegetable oil.<sup>39</sup>

That year Secretary of Agriculture, Ezra Taft Benson told Congress, "Even though we

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<sup>37</sup> Schedule A of Agreement between CARE and Union of CARE employees. CARE 16, Union of CARE Employees – Negotiations - Grievances, File 1 of 2, 1946-47.

<sup>38</sup> French diary.

<sup>39</sup> See Matusow, Field, Shapsmeire and Shapsmeire, Ruttan, ed, *Why Food Aid?*; Cathie; Wallerstein, *...Food for Peace*. On Farmers see Field, *Harvest of Dissent: The National Farmers Union and Early Cold War*; On Marshall Plan, see Shephers, *Long Road Home*, Hogan, *The Marshall Plan*.

should not harvest a single bushel of wheat this year, we would still have enough on hand to meet our full domestic requirements, plus most of our foreseeable exports.”<sup>40</sup> When news reports vividly portrayed starving people on the continent, Americans had cause for embarrassment. As Murray Lincoln put it, the country faced a “moral challenge of abundance.” That challenge, he said, intimately linked American farmers and consumers with the well-being and interests of people throughout the world.<sup>41</sup>

United States domestic agricultural policy was a key enabling factor in the growth of international food aid after the war. Under the New Deal system of crop subsidies, the USDA purchased commodities at parity prices and stored them until more favorable market conditions appeared. One result of the crop support system was the creation of an enormous “surplus” of staple commodities. For some like Murray Lincoln, the surplus represented an opportunity and a moral responsibility. For others, however, the surplus represented a political and economic “problem.” Milo Perkins told Paul Comly French that the surplus problem was intensifying and the USDA “doesn’t really know which way to jump.”<sup>42</sup> Republican law makers supported President Eisenhower’s policy of “trade not aid” but American farmers were solidly wedded to the New Deal supports. If American crop yields continued, the surplus would only grow. Paul Comly French advised Congress to take the humanitarian course rather than force a cut-back on production. America, he said,

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<sup>40</sup> Report on Legislative Work on S 2475 July 1954, CARE.

<sup>41</sup> MDL April 12, 1956.

<sup>42</sup> Perkins to French, October 4, 1949, CARE 27, Ag Surplus Milo Perkins Corresp.

should “make intelligent use” of the surplus. “I have been increasingly disturbed,” he said, “in seeing the agricultural surplus in this country not used for constructive relief purposes and wonder why it wouldn’t be possible for the government to attempt a program where these supplies could go to Europe and Asia rather than rot in the United States.”<sup>43</sup>

One obvious way to meet the problem would be to allow food relief agencies access to surplus commodities. There was considerable competition between the Departments of Agriculture and State over how the surplus was to be used. The Department of State clearly had specific strategic goals in mind while Agriculture was more concerned with getting rid of the stores that were sitting in government warehouses. Beginning with the Marshall Plan and continuing with legislation like the 1948 Mutual Security Act, Congress had allowed the USDA to donate some commodities for foreign relief via private agencies. While the two agencies vied for control over surplus commodities, CARE, along with Catholic Relief Services, began to lobby for access to the surplus for humanitarian purposes. At one point, Milo Perkins went so far as to suggest to Congress that instead of creating a new government agency for food relief they should let private agencies, notably CARE, take over. CARE, he said, has “the advantage of not representing a sectarian or national interest group...but rather an overall American humanitarian approach.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> French to Paul J. Kilday, February 2, 1950. CARE 27. Also Memorandum on Surplus Agricultural Commodities, CARE 27, AG Surplus – Corresp Misc 1950-54.

<sup>44</sup> Perkins to French, October 4, 1949, CARE 27

The interesting thing here is that private relief agencies looked to Congress and the USDA for access to food supplies rather than to corporate outlets. Food for Freedom's Board, for example, toyed with the idea of bringing corporate leaders like Clarence Frances, president of General Foods, representatives from Standard Brands, or the Grocery Manufacturers Association into the organization. Ultimately, however, they rejected the idea with one Board member noting, "if we could secure the approval of the men who are prominent in food production we could probably be financed, but we would be working under them – it would be their program not ours."<sup>45</sup> Indeed, despite their desire to run their organizations on business principles, CARE leaders, for example, fundamentally mistrusted corporate institutions, particularly when it came to food aid. Murray Lincoln, for example, eagerly courted his agricultural contacts in the USDA but did not look to business contacts for CARE supplies. In part, of course, the cost of corporate food supplies would no doubt be higher than USDA surplus commodities. But Lincoln also insisted that agencies like CARE would do a better job of "foreign development" than "exploitative companies in it only for profit."<sup>46</sup> Paul Comly French was similarly skeptical about the motives of private food companies when it came to food aid. The businessmen he met on the ferry ride to CARE's New York office, for example, "look sad and worried." He wondered "if any work is worth making human beings so worried, or if any commercial enterprise is worth what it takes from people."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> FFF need ref.

<sup>46</sup> Lincoln to Coughlin, June 16, 1953, MDL 3:3

<sup>47</sup> French Diary

As the food crisis in Europe eased, agencies organized for post-war aid faced a dilemma. Some leaders in CARE and Oxfam, in particular, suggested that their organizations' purpose had been successfully fulfilled and the agency should be disbanded. By this time however, both groups had become major institutions with considerable investments in operations, public relations, and government ties as well. The sense of urgency that marked post-war European operations began to shift to other parts of the world.<sup>48</sup> By 1952 CARE operated in 42 countries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America and had become "a big-time player in the distribution of bulk government surplus foods for both relief and development."<sup>49</sup> By the early 1950s, Oxfam too had shifted its focus from European hunger to a more general development agenda. Cecil Jackson-Cole, for example, wanted to "bring the Oxfam spirit to India" and in 1951 launched appeal for relief for the Bihar famine. The organization became the largest British overseas agency. The post-war emergency food crisis was clearly becoming a much larger problem of global hunger and development. In a certain sense, food aid had always been linked to development. In 1943, for example, UNRRA chief Herbert H. Lehman observed, "...a relief program without a simultaneous program for economic rehabilitation would

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<sup>48</sup> Some groups pulled out of the CARE cooperative including Church World Service, National Council of Churches of Christ. The issue was complicated because some of these groups saw CARE as infringing on their own relief work and donor base. Memorandum to : Messrs. Paul Comly French, etc., from Philip Olzer, Subject: Religious Agencies/CARE, August 6, 1954. CARE 27. See also, Howard Miner to Murray D. Lincoln, February 4, 1952, MDL 3:3; "Statement to CARE Planning Committee, Richard Reuter, July 1955, CARE 6.; Memo to Planning and Policy Committee from Paul Comly French, July 12, 1955 CARE 6.

<sup>49</sup> CARE changed its name to reflect the new situation: Cooperative for American Remittances Everywhere. Campbell, 71. Also Memo to Planning and Policy Committee from Paul Comly French, July 12, 1955. CARE 6.

be comparable to attempting to bail out a leaky boat without plugging the leak.”<sup>50</sup> By the early 1950s, however, the urgent atmosphere that energized post war relief efforts transformed into an almost perpetual crisis management problem of seeming intractable hunger throughout the world. World food shortages, it seemed, were a permanent feature of the post-war world.<sup>51</sup>

In their turn to food crises outside Europe, relief agencies became increasingly tied to government resources. Although British food supplies were considerably smaller than in the US, Oxfam nonetheless, pressed Parliament to “provide more overseas aid once the country can afford it.” Both sides,” Cecil Jackson-Cole said, “are necessary in this world task.”<sup>52</sup> Jackson-Cole’s logic was revealing. He said that if government does not provide aid the work of charities would not be “extra, as it should be, but only instead of Government supplying it.” In fact, he added, “if we do not at least show publicly that we are in favour of Governments supporting this work, could it now come to be thought that one of the two ways ([ie government] is unnecessary?” The world-wide need is so immense, Jackson Cole insisted, “that all ways are needed and we can surely be thankful that voluntary efforts have brought matters to this point where governments can now help on the larger scale.”<sup>53</sup> For CARE, the logic of institutional growth directly increased the organization’s dependence on USDA commodities and hence on US foreign interests as well. By the early 1950s, for example, the significance of private donations paled in comparison

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<sup>50</sup> NYT 7/11/43

<sup>51</sup> See Wallerstein, 34.

<sup>52</sup> Jackson Cole Reminiscences, Oxfam.

<sup>53</sup> Jackson Cole Remeniscences 4 Oxfam.



to the funds CARE received from government contracts. According to one estimate, CARE brought in \$25 million in surplus food compared to just \$1 million in private contributions.”<sup>54</sup>

The expansion and institutionalization of humanitarian agencies during the 1950s was fueled in large part by the challenge of abundance in the West and in the US most particularly. It was access to surplus commodities that most directly contributed to CARE’s growth and its move into areas like Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. While the question of the surplus continued to spark heated political debate, the reality was that farm productivity rose and stores of surplus commodities increased.<sup>55</sup> The political problem of the surplus was ultimately resolved with the passage of PL 480, the Agricultural Trade, Development, and Assistant Act, which later became “Food for Peace.” PL 480 allowed for the expansion of American agricultural markets abroad by letting “friendly” governments purchase commodities with local currency instead of US dollars. The key for humanitarian agencies, however, were the provisions allowing the USDA to donate surplus food via private relief organizations. It was CARE, as much as any other agency, that shaped the wording of those provisions.

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<sup>54</sup> Campbell Chapter 6, “Broader Focus.”

<sup>55</sup> The Eisenhower Administration favored “trade not aid,” but was politically unable to eliminate agricultural supports and thus the surplus continued to grow. Farm groups generally supported the bill which ensured subsidies and continued support for expanding production. The Departments of State and Agriculture had been in arguing over which agency should control the surplus, but President Eisenhower made sure that PL 480 divided administrative responsibility “thereby giving each an operating stake in the successful implementation of the program.” See Wallerstein 34-37. Also, Cathie, Ruttan. *Field, Harvest of Dissent*.

PL 480 has been variously characterized as a humanitarian measure that benefited both American farmers and hungry people around the world, a food dumping policy that seriously distorted Third World markets or a tool of Cold War foreign policy supporting “friendly” governments including un-democratic dictators who grew rich off of US supplies while perpetuating hunger among their own populations. This trend only became more evident as the Cold War heated up. According to one account, for example, from 1954-1962, US food aid via PL 480 was distributed among over 130 countries including Israel, India, Egypt, and Korea. After 1962, however, 75% of PL480 food went to only fifteen countries, most notably, Vietnam.<sup>56</sup> For American aid agencies including CARE and Catholic Relief Services, however, PL 480 became an essential part of their institutional operations. By one estimate, between 1945 and 1981 CARE and CRS together distributed over half of the PL480 food aid.<sup>57</sup> CARE handled increasingly large amounts of commodities via US government contracts and expanded its operations dramatically.

One commentator has called P.L 480 a double edged sword of US agricultural policy. It stabilized commodity prices and responded to both humanitarian and strategic aims.<sup>58</sup> It certainly did both of those things, but it also tied relief agencies to government supplies and government priorities in unintended ways that had

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<sup>56</sup> Ruttan, Cathie 23-24.

<sup>57</sup> Cathie 32.

<sup>58</sup> Wallerstein. Need page.

profound effects not only on the nature of relief organizations and the development of international food aid, but on humanitarian work more generally.

If PL 480 codified the relationship between private food aid organizations and the US government policies, it also fundamentally altered the internal workings of the organizations themselves. In the wake of WW II CARE founders believed American Abundance was a privilege carrying with it duties and responsibilities both at home and abroad. For them, humanitarianism was an incontestably necessary antidote to the devastations of war and the threat of Soviet influence. At the same time, the logic of organizational expansion proved irresistible to humanitarian activists who were convinced that their work was crucial to ending hunger, poverty, and war and to rebuilding democratic institutions. The combination of institutional logic and a anti-Soviet liberalism pushed CARE, in particular, ever more into the orbit of US strategic policy. Liberal anti-communists like French and Murray – not to mention hundreds of CARE supporters, employees, and volunteers – preferred to ally with the public forces of government than with corporate agriculture or food producers. As the Cold War heated up, however, food aid moved into the center stage of US global strategy. For CARE, this meant that government contracts for food supplies were increasingly targeted to areas of US strategic concern including India, the Middle East, Korea, and, ultimately, Vietnam. The worlds of private foreign relief, American Agricultural policy, and US strategic interests thus converged. The unintended consequences of this alliance, however, shaped a world food aid system in which humanitarian concerns were at times overshadowed and at other times

mobilized for geopolitical ends.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, while seemingly separate operations, as the post-war food aid trajectory reveals, today, NGOs and governments are linked in an international aid system that promises at once to expand the potential for relief of hunger and poverty, and at the same time, limits the real effectiveness of that aid.

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<sup>59</sup> CARE went through a major reorganization after the passage of PL 480. See Campbell 71 and Chapter 5. French Memo to Planning and Policy Committee July 12, 1955, CARE 6; Reorganization July 1-20, 1955. Also Richard Reuter Statement to CARE Planning Committee, July 1955. Reuter replaced French as ED, he later became the first director of President Kennedy's Food for Peace Program. According to Cathie Reuter resigned when LBJ pressured voluntary agencies to move into Vietnam. 15.