

Address given by Pierre Elvinger, the Luxembourg delegate at the third session of the UNRRA Council (London, August 1945)

Caption: At the third session of the UNRRA Council held in London in August 1945, Pierre Elvinger, a delegate from Luxembourg, gives a speech detailing the economic situation in the Grand Duchy and highlighting the national industry's need of coal and coke.

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‘Commenting on his report, the Director General emphasised that it is extremely urgent for the countries of Western Europe to obtain coal immediately, before winter begins. This is especially true of Luxembourg, which is entirely dependent on coal and coke. The two main resources of the Grand Duchy, which are vital to its economy, are the iron and steel industry and agriculture. One third of the population depends directly or indirectly on mining and metallurgy, another third on agriculture and animal husbandry. The iron and steel industry is almost paralysed by lack of coke. Agriculture was severely damaged by the Rundstedt offensive, which destroyed about half its productive capacity. The role of Luxembourg’s heavy industry is vital, not only for Luxembourg itself but for much of Europe. In peace-time it manufactured a wide variety of finished and semi-finished products; 95% of its iron and steel output was exported, and many important secondary products such as Thomas slag and cement were in great demand from most European countries.

Since September 1944, our heavy industry has been at a standstill due to lack of fuel, apart from two minor blast furnaces that were used purely for the military needs of the occupying forces.

There is plenty of iron ore ready to be extracted, and there are enough other raw materials such as lime and manganese to enable us to run our blast furnaces and rolling mills. But Luxembourg produces no coal at all.

The normal rate of coke consumption in peace-time was 290 000 tonnes a month, of which about 200 000 tonnes were imported from the German regions of Aachen, Cologne and the Ruhr. The rest came from Belgium and the Netherlands. Luxembourg imported 30 % of the total amount of coke exported by Germany. But up to now we have received no coke from Germany. In a magnificent gesture of national solidarity, the Luxembourg iron and steel companies have not laid off any workers or office staff and are paying them their normal wages and salaries with nothing in return. One company has already paid out over 350 million Luxembourg francs. However, their reserves are about to run dry, and unless the companies are able to resume production very soon, even on a reduced scale, they will be forced to lay off thousands of workers and office staff. The possibility of mass unemployment in this strategic area of Europe, which is not yet entirely at peace, is a serious threat to social order.

Luxembourg primarily needs coke. Of course our agriculture has been severely damaged. We are in urgent need of agricultural equipment to help the farming industry and rebuild the dairy farms; over 40 % of our dairies have been completely destroyed. But this problem, serious as it is, takes second place to our need for industrial fuel.

It might be argued that the coke problem should be discussed with the European Coal Organisation, the Combined Board of Resources, or other executive or consultative bodies, rather than with UNRRA. That is wrong. In fact, the problem is highly relevant to UNRRA. If Luxembourg can resume its industrial activity, even partially, it can play a major role in supplying neighbouring allied countries with basic products that are urgently needed. Our industrial capacity is considerable and it is intact. All it needs in order to be of great service are supplies of coke and coal. Once our blast furnaces are working again, we shall be able to export slag to the Netherlands for its badly damaged soil, as well as to Belgium, Switzerland and parts of France. Once our foundries are working again, we shall be able to provide our dairies and flour mills with the machines they so badly need, and to export large quantities of animal fats and cereals to neighbouring countries. Once our steel works are running again, we shall be able to supply girders, rails, sheet metal and bars, bridges and other products essential to the reconstruction of roads and railways. Of course we cannot ignore our own needs. We have to rebuild entire farming communities, and we will need to use, for our own purposes, a greater proportion of what our factories produce than in peace-time, but we shall still be able to make a very considerable share of our output available to our neighbours.

Luxembourg still needs some key products and, as one of the members of the United Nations most affected by the war, it has the right to demand them. Among other things, it has to replace a great number of horses and much of its livestock massacred or stolen during the Rundstedt offensive, as well as many other products.

Nevertheless, it wants to help and will help the other European nations as much as possible. It has the means to do so. All it needs — and that is absolutely essential — is coke. That is our real problem. As long as our blast furnaces, steelworks and foundries are idle, our agriculture will never recover, our whole social and economic structure will remain paralysed, and our small country, far from playing a valuable part in the reconstruction of Western Europe, will become yet another burden on the United Nations.'