

Statement made by Dean Acheson (Montreal, 18 September 1944)

Caption: On 18 September 1944, at the presentation of the first activities report drawn up by UNRRA, Dean Acheson, American Representative of the State Department, emphasises the importance of future UNRRA missions and recalls the urgent nature of the actual situation.

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Like all my colleagues on this Council, I have listened with the greatest interest to the discussion of the Director General's *Report*. This discussion seems to me to show the wisdom of the drafters of our Agreement, when they followed the common custom of the draftsmen of constitutions in providing for periodic meetings of the legislative body of this organization, for these meetings are not merely to perform the current business which may come before the Council. They are much more than that. They are periodic occasions for stocktaking. They are occasions when we must search our hearts and our consciences to see whether we have done everything that we could have done, to find out those matters which we have neglected and to repair that neglect, and, perhaps even more than that, to re-appraise the situation which faces us in the light of new developments, new challenges, and new problems, and to renew our determination and our inspiration to meet these problems and these challenges. I feel that in what has been said this morning there is a response to the challenge which is before us.

This meeting is a very different one from our last meeting. At that time we met just after having completed one of the great decisions which the nations associated together in this war have made. That decision was to approach the problem of relief and rehabilitation from the point of view of an international organization. For all of the countries represented here that was a great decision. But for my own country it was a particularly important step. It was a step which began to resolve differences of view which had long existed in my country. It was a step along a road which for us holds large possibilities for the future. It was a step which was not lightly taken.

At a recent meeting I submitted to the Council the resolutions of the Congress of the United States authorizing the President to participate in the work of this organization and clothing him with the necessary financial resources to do so. Those resolutions were carefully considered. They had precise reservations in order to make clear the position of the Congress. They took many months of discussion, but having made that decision, the Congress of the United States and the people of the United States are unreservedly behind this Administration.

[...]

What has been done ? I wonder whether all the Members of the Council appreciated the significance of the reports of the Combined Boards which they heard yesterday ? It was a hot room ; much of the reading was very dull ; there was the tendency—certainly a strong tendency on my part—to drift off into contemplation and not listen to these words which we had before us on paper. But these were most pregnant and important words. The significance of these words was that the supplying countries have taken upon themselves the responsibility for supply. UNRRA during these intervening months has done all it could, with great energy, in bringing before the Combined Boards and the supply authorities of the various countries the prospective needs for relief.

In the reports which you heard yesterday the supplying authorities assumed the responsibility for furnishing the supplies and told us that, generally speaking, the supplies would be available. I ask you to let me read to you the first sentence of the summary of the report of the Combined Food Boards : *The Board has confidence that, given the necessary co-operation between governments, the problem of meeting over-all requirements of Allied countries in Europe during 1945 can be met.* It can be met, said the Boards, and the Boards say that you may count on their utmost co-operation and determination to see that it is met.

The significance of that, I submit, is that the time has come for UNRRA to put to one side worry about availability of supplies. That is somebody else's responsibility. Somebody else has undertaken to meet that responsibility. If they fail, as they will not, we will know where the responsibility lies. The task of UNRRA now is to organize itself, to put in its demands for procurement, to prepare its people for distribution and transportation, and to get forward with action and not worry further about the availability of supplies.

That, gentlemen, I believe to have been a tremendous step. Perhaps it is the outstanding milestone which will mark this meeting of the conference.

What then, are some of the things which remain to be done ? Those, I submit to you, fall into two groups : the things which it remains for the governments to do and the things which it remains for UNRRA to do.

What are the other things that the governments can and should do ?

The first, I submit, is clear. The first step is to complete the contributions to UNRRA. This is not an easy thing to do. No one knows better than I do how much time it takes. No one has compared more than I have the speed with which Iceland, the United Kingdom and Canada made their contributions available and the degree of time which it took my own country to reach the same point. Constitutional methods are different. Some are more cumbersome and ponderous than others. Ours were of that nature. Many of you have the same situations to face. And therefore you will understand that there is not the slightest note of criticism, as there could not be, in what I say when I urge all the members of the Council to proceed, and to urge their governments to proceed, with the utmost speed in completing the arrangements for their contributions.

It should be clear, I think, to all of us that the determination of what any government shall do is solely in its hands. It should be clear also that there cannot be and will not be at any time the slightest shade of criticism of the action taken by any government. All that UNRRA can ask, all that one's colleagues on the Council can ask, is that action be taken. Time is running out. We are at the threshold of the period when we must move. I therefore urge, the task of relief. That decision, I trust and hope, is equally felt in all the countries represented here. It carries with it responsibilities on our part, and it carries with it also responsibilities on the part of the Administration. For our reason in participating in this work is not only the result of the humanitarian urge to do something in a situation such as that which now confronts us. Nor is it merely also the self-interest which we all feel in seeing that a world torn to pieces by war is put again on the way to reconstruction.

There is something even deeper than all of this in our participation, and that is that no nation can ever live with itself again with self-respect if it has not joined in this work. Never again can that people feel that it is a self-respecting people. Therefore, knowing that, we have all joined in the work, and knowing that, the Administration must not and cannot fail us. It is in a real sense the keeper of our consciences. It is the avenue through which that desire, that necessity to do something which will enable us to live with ourselves in self-respect may find expression.

At this meeting we may turn our eyes backward or forward. If we look backward, we see not only the period of origination about which I have spoken, but we see also the intervening period between November 1943 and this September. We see a period of waiting, a period of organization, a period of doing all the dull things that have to be done, and a period when all the sense of frustration and restlessness occurred which comes with waiting.

It is quite true, as our colleague from the United Kingdom has said, that the high tide of public enthusiasm and approval has ebbed. There is criticism. We must not doubt for a moment that that criticism is not only directed at the organization called UNRRA, but at the governments which form that organization.

It may be that the criticism is not justified. The point is that it exists. The point is that we are looking back over a period which has been a difficult period. That does not give us a reason to be sorry for ourselves. It does not give us a reason to look about to see whether there is someone to blame. Other men have waited far longer than we have waited. For years millions of men waited in the United Kingdom for the day which finally came on the sixth of June. During that period they did not become frustrated neurotics. They put in that time with such intensive preparation that when the day for action came, one of the most amazing military exploits in history was seen.

The question for us is, have we put in the period of waiting and are we putting it in with the same sort of preparation, or are we putting it in by complaining and by worrying and by wondering when we can act ?

So far as UNRRA is concerned I believe that much constructive work has been done. I believe that it comes

down to the threshold of action, wiser, better prepared, with more work behind it than we had reason to expect when we last met.

If we turn our eyes forward instead of backward, we see that we are now at a period of action. We are at a time when, whether we like it or not, we must stop planning, we must stop meeting, we must stop talking, and we must act. As General Edgerton said yesterday, the watchword of this period is urgency. This is not a waiting war. There can be no waiting, there can be no delay, there can be no more meetings ; we must be prepared to act.

So I ask you for the moment to take a quick look at what has been done and quick look at what remains to be done, and then join with me in a determination to plunge into what remains to be done and do it quickly.

[...]

Perhaps of equal and even more importance than contribution of goods and funds are contributions of men and women. UNRRA cannot succeed unless it has the best and ablest and most energetic brains that all these countries can make available. All of the countries are extended, some almost beyond the point of endurance, by the demands of the war. All governments seriously, desperately, need their best men and women. But UNRRA needs them too and there must be sacrifices, and when UNRRA asks for help in contributions of people—people to perform high offices or administrative offices or any offices—the governments should respond by giving as far as they can of their best talent. That is the second thing which governments can do.

There is a third thing that governments can do. UNRRA cannot act in any territory without the consent of the government. Whether that consent needs to be given by military authorities, by administrative authorities, in territories, by governments whose help and co-operation are needed, it must be given. It lies across the threshold of UNRRA action. Therefore governments can and should co-operate with UNRRA. They should make it possible to act. It is not proper, it is not desirable, it will not be the purpose of any government represented here to delay or withhold consent for any necessary step by UNRRA and at the same time demand from UNRRA that action be taken.

Therefore, I urge that as and when the Director General discusses with any government the steps which he believes to be necessary, those discussions be pushed and proceed as quickly as possible to a conclusion. The views of the governments and the Director General must of course be reconciled and met, but the need here for action is great, and I urge therefore, as one of the things that governments can do, to speed this work, to get forward with the decisions which are necessary before UNRRA can act.

Now what are some of the things which UNRRA can do,—the Administration of this organization here ?

I submit that the first thing that it can and should do is to see that it is organized now for action, and that an organization which in the opening months had to be directed towards planning and organization is now reviewed so that it is a competent organization which can act. It must be one which first of all can decide and decide quickly, and secondly, one which can act and act quickly, and in which authority is clear and responsibility is clear. There is a great temptation in every international organization to so set up the scheme of organization that it is dealt with diplomatically rather than efficiently. It is easy, when there are conflicting demands of various nations, to create offices with equal power. That is not harmful if the organization is a contemplative one. It is destructive if the organization is one which calls for action. Therefore I ask and urge that the Administration with vigour and courage and whatever ruthlessness is necessary review its scheme of organization to see whether it is adapted to action.

I suggest also that the Administration and the Committees of the Council should consider very carefully their respective spheres of competence and activity. Speakers have warned us this morning against the multiplication of committees. I join in urging that the multiplication of these committees cease.

We have constitutional committees provided for in the Agreement. Those committees have duties ; they are important duties. In so far as they are performed vigorously and realistically we will get what the Agreement

provides for and contemplates, an interplay between the Administration which is carrying out executive powers and has great freedom of action, and advisory members of the Council grouped territorially and functionally, who give wise advice. In so far as committees are multiplied merely for the purpose of being busy they fall into uselessness. Their words are not heeded if there are many words and if there are many subjects. If committees go on threshing over old straw and dealing up old reports in new forms they are wasting the Administration's time and they are diverting its energy. If the committees will work realistically and vigorously on the problems which are ahead of us—tough problems, serious problems—and will give the Administration recommendations which commend themselves by their wisdom, the Administration can and should be governed by that advice. But it is only by realism and vigour on both sides, and not by wasted energy, that the interplay of committee and executive can work.

Another matter which UNRRA can deal with is the recruitment of personnel for action. After all, people are more important than organization. With good people and a bad organization something can be done. But with bad people and poor organization or good organization nothing can be done. Therefore it is necessary for the Administration to get people and to get vigorous people. We cannot expect the Director General to produce supermen. We do not want supermen, but we want good commonsense men and women whose desire is to get something done. Idealism is important. Idealism is particularly rampant in relief work, but I submit that at the present stage, drive is more important than idealism.

The Director General has reported to us that he has 600 persons recruited to do the work in the Balkans. That, I believe, is a very fine report ; that is excellent. But they will be only a small number out of the total which the Administration will need. I for one would vigorously support the Administration if it proceeded in a way which might seem at first wasteful, to recruit considerable numbers of people to act as armies must in time of war, to have forces ready to throw in wherever the front opens, wherever the need for action occurs, even though many of them just waited, as our troops in England had to wait until D-Day. But we must be in the position, where action becomes necessary, where opportunity opens, where the supplies are available and where there are no people to take them in the various areas and to work on the distribution of them.

A further step which the Administration of UNRRA is taking and can press forward vigorously with has been referred to by our colleagues from China and Australia. The Administration has told us of the establishment of offices in Sydney and Chungking. We all applaud that step. We think it must be followed quickly. Committees are important, but it makes little difference whether the Committee for the Far East meets in one place or in another so long as it meets and makes whatever recommendations it will make. But it is of tremendous importance that there be offices of UNRRA and personnel of UNRRA who are examining problems in the area at first hand and are prepared to act upon them as soon as action is possible.

As the Director General has told us, and as we understand, much of the concentration of effort at the present time has been on Europe. From now on there must be equal concentration of time and energy and people on the colossal tasks in the Far East which lie ahead.

My colleague from the United Kingdom has made reference to the two important matters of health and welfare, and I should like to touch very briefly on these in the same vein as I have spoken on the other matters. These are tasks which both the Administration and Council have before them.

As far as dealing with displaced persons is concerned, we in the Council and many members of the Administration have been spending months of discussion on the periphery of the question as to what are the limits of the people with whom we shall deal. Shall we deal with the people in this area and not with the people in that ? Happily this discussion has been going on and the Administration has been pushing forward energetically with the actual question of dealing with the people who are right before us and about whom there is no question—the millions of people who will be waiting for help at once.

The relations between the Administration and the Allied High Command in London are an example of the way in which this matter should be touched. For our part we can contribute by quickly ending what appears to be an interminable discussion as to what is the exact status of the displaced persons who should be cared for. Let us either decide the question or decide that we won't decide it. Let us not drain the energy of people

who are working on other questions by discussion of questions many of which are theoretical or far distant at the best. Let us not neglect the problem which is at our doorstep by worrying about problems which are away around the corner.

Similarly with the matter of health. We have heard of the practical problem that is before us. We have recognized that we have a sanitary convention. Let us deal with that. That should be our contribution to the meeting. The Administration will have a tremendous task of enlisting doctors, scientists, administrative officers of all sorts to help various occupied countries to deal with the problem of epidemics. We are asked to amend the sanitary convention. Let us get on with it. Let us take it up and decide to do it or not to do it. It seems to me clearly necessary to do it, but at any rate let us decide and get that behind us.

These, gentlemen, are some of the matters which still remain to be done. I should like to close my remarks with the same expression with which I opened, that the Government of the United States has made its choice. It has put its hand to the plough and will not look back. It is irrevocably committed to UNRRA and will give itself fully.

I should like to read to you the instructions which I as well as every officer of the United States who deals with UNRRA have received from the President of the United States.

These instructions are contained in a letter which he wrote on 6 July, the day he signed the Executive Order transferring to the Foreign Economic Administration the authority to deal with the hundreds of millions of dollars which the Congress made available. The President instructed all officers of the United States who in their work come in contact with UNRRA as follows :

I have already stressed to the United States allocating authorities the importance of relief and rehabilitation programmes. It is of great importance as a matter of national policy that there be available in all liberated areas those supplies that will be necessary for the health and welfare of people in those areas. Supplies and services contributed by the United States through UNRRA are intended to help those people to help themselves. In accordance with that policy I am sure that you will recognize in all your work relative to UNRRA the major significance of these needs and will press their importance throughout your Administration and with the allocating, procurement and other agencies assisting in this work.

Every officer of the United States carries those orders from the President of the United States. Therefore, I urge as I am instructed to urge, as I wish to urge, what I believe is the major significance of the needs of UNRRA. I suggest to this Council that there can be no finer recognition of the major needs of the Council than a determination to proceed with unity and speed to dispose of the work before us and thus permit the officers of the Administration to return to the task of furnishing relief and rehabilitation where it is needed.