

UNRRA Program in Italy (9 October 1945)

Caption: On 9 October 1945, Spurgeon M. Keeny, Chief of Mission of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) in Italy, presents a first report on the UNRRA aid policy on the Italian peninsula.

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UNRRA Program in Italy1

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UNRRA at present is carrying on in Italy a limited program. This was authorized by the Council at its second session in Montreal, September 1944. This program is not to cost more than \$50,000,000. It is serving children and mothers with supplementary rations and giving some medical aid to the population generally, also assistance in care of displaced persons.

The UNRRA Council has authorized an expanded – a full scale – program in Italy at as early a time as it can be started. We are working toward the goal of starting it early in January. Carrying on this program, of course, will be possible only if the uninvaded member nations of UNRRA contribute the supplies and funds asked by the Council at its meeting in London, August 1945, when a second contribution of one percent of the national income of each of the 31 uninvaded member nations in the year ended June 30, 1943 was requested.

Continued aid to Italy after January 1 is a matter of life and death for that country. Italy cannot grow enough food to feed itself. Southern Italy is especially poor, and the Allied armies have done a good job in caring for civilians in the face of great difficulties. The military program of assistance ended September 1. Then began the three-month FEA interim program of \$100,000,000. This is a good beginning to assist Italy to its feet. That program, besides providing food, medicine, clothing, and other necessities of daily life, will send some cotton, wool, and rubber to help start industry going and give aid to men previously employed by the military or returned from forced labor in Germany. But this FEA supply line will end in December. Unless UNRRA funds become available, the pipeline will become dry.

Italian industry is almost entirely dependent on imported coal. If Italy has coal, cotton, and wool, she can make some of her own clothing. This method instead of cutting deeply into our own supply of textiles provides a market for some of our surplus cotton and wool. The cloth made will in turn bring to market more of the wheat that the Italian farmer now tends to hold back because he is afraid to sell for lire that have little buying power.

Italy's wheat crop this year is the worst in 20 years. She must have at least 150,000 tons of wheat a month until the next harvest. Even this amount of wheat will not increase the present meager rationed food supply of less than 1,000 calories daily per person. Of course, Italians get more than this. But everything beyond the 1,000 calories of rationed food must be bought in the open market at prices so high that the average family's earnings must nearly all go for food.

But the expanded UNRRA program contemplated for Italy if the uninvaded United Nations provide the financing must do more than help to feed the country. If nothing more is done, Italy will be as helpless at the end of 1946 as it is now. Phosphate rock and spare parts for agricultural machinery must be brought in to help Italy grow more food. Anyone who has traveled throughout Italy must be impressed with the fact that every bit of land is being cultivated except those spots that have been mined or flooded. Anyone who says Italy is not trying to help itself has not seen men and women dig entire fields by hand for the lack of animals to pull the plows.

The 1945 UNRRA program for Italy is limited to the feeding of undernourished children, to medical care, and to assistance to displaced persons and refugees to return to their homes. About 1 million children are now being fed. This number will increase to 2 million before Christmas. Emergency medical and hospital supplies are being distributed. By next year Italy will be able to make many of its own medicines but to do so will need most of the raw chemicals and drugs. The return of displaced persons and refugees is well under way. Almost 1 million Italians have been returned from Germany by the military, which has done an excellent job in moving a great number of people home before winter. In addition, almost 1 million Italians in Italy must be returned to the homes from which they were removed at the time of military operations. Finding shelter is the most difficult problem because nearly 6 million rooms have been destroyed in Italy in military operations.

The second-hand clothing contributed by the American people is proving a godsend to Italians who are able to buy nothing new because supplies are so short and prices so high. In Italy, a shirt now costs at least \$15 and a pair of men's shoes \$50 worth of lire. At this moment, some 5 million pounds of clothing from the recent drive are on their way to Italy, where they will be distributed by UNRRA and American Relief for Italy in cooperation.

Of all parts of Italy, Sardinia is perhaps the hardest hit. Its production was small in normal times, and its crops have failed this year both because of the drought and because of the plague of grasshoppers. In addition, it has one of the worst malaria rates in Italy. In order to deal with the situation a project is being worked out with the Rockefeller Foundation whereby it is hoped to stamp out malaria in Sardinia within two years. UNRRA will supply the materials, using largely army-surplus transport and medical supplies; local expenditures will be supplied by the Italian Government, and the technical supervision will be done by the Rockefeller Foundation.

In all of the relief program Italy is a full partner, and for every dollar of supplies landed in the country it contributes 100 lire to a special fund. This means that all of UNRRA's money can be used to buy supplies. The Italian contribution pays all expenses of the program in the country. All lire not so spent will be used to extend the program and to serve as a cushion when UNRRA withdraws, as it hopes to do, by the end of 1946.

It is not always understood that the proposed so-called "expanded" UNRRA program for 1946 is not an expansion at all but a merging of the present limited UNRRA program and that which has been carried by the military and FEA. This relief is essential to the life of Italy, because Italy's economy is a highly dependent one. Parallel with this relief, however, there must be developed a program of commercial credits which will make it possible for Italy to make additional purchases of raw materials, especially of industrial supplies. Only if this program of credits and raw materials is pushed at full speed can international trade be resumed and relief be promptly brought to an end.

¹ Statement by Spurgeon M. Keeny, Chief, UNRRA Italian Mission.