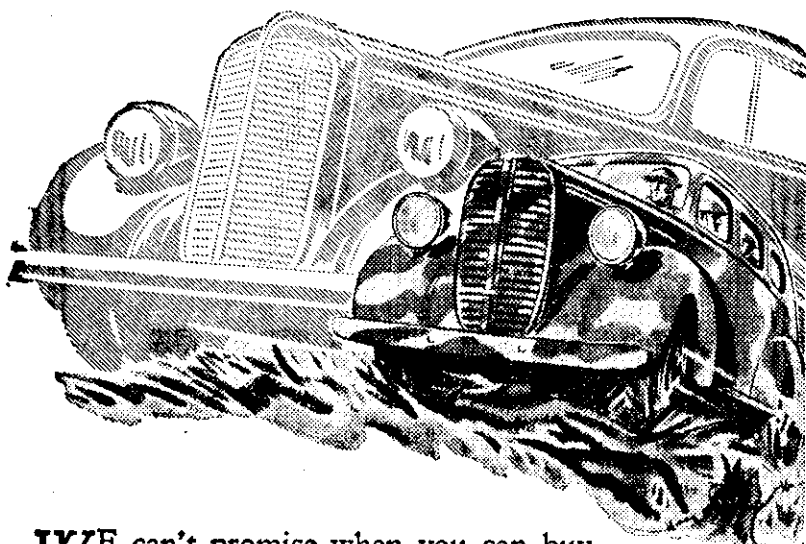


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A "Listener" Interview

THE WORLD'S BIGGEST MENDING JOB

Arousing Public Opinion About UNRRA

THE end of the fighting in Europe was the beginning of something that may leave as big a mark on international relations as the desperate struggle with Hitler. The conquering nations have turned in a few hours from killing Europeans to feeding and clothing them — so systematically and so thoroughly that already the wheels are revolving in New Zealand.

The Listener has just been talking to a man who was selected five months ago to prepare public opinion for this task in this part of the world. He is Ken McKenna, formerly of the literary staff of the Melbourne Herald, and now a wanderer through the whole South-west Pacific area as chief public information officer for UNRRA there. There is so much to be done that it was useless trying to get the whole story at one interview, but Mr. McKenna told us to fire ahead with our questions and use our own discretion on his replies.

"Well, tell us," we said desperately to begin with, "precisely what your job is."

"My job? I suppose it is to tell you, and everyone else who will listen, about the world's biggest mending job (as one of our executives has called it). From Greece to northern Norway, from Holland and Belgium to Poland there are thousands of once prosperous villages now charred ruins, with decimated populations struggling against destitution and disease. Europe is cold — Europe is hungry — Europe is sick. . . For five years the textile mills have not been turning out civilian goods. Protracted hunger and inadequate shelter and clothing breed disease. It is my job to get that fact into the imagination of all humane New Zealanders."

A Job for All

"The end of your job, or just the beginning?"

"I don't think I can look as far ahead as that. The dimensions of the task are frightening even at this early stage, and what things will look like this time next year I just don't ask myself."

"But your own part in it will remain publicity?"

"Yes, I am a journalist, and it is publicity I have been asked to contribute. But a man who works for 44 nations feels about as big as a grain of sand. This war has loosed on the world the greatest tidal wave of destruction and suffering it has known. It was recognised that the task of repair was not one for one nation, or two or three; but required the co-operation of all. So the United Nations, acting together, pledged themselves to help the many millions who sacrificed everything in the common fight against Fascism. Common humanity demands that this be done. It is necessary also because we cannot hope to establish a just and lasting peace if liberated areas are allowed to fester with

disease, unemployment, inflation, and unrest."

"Are you thinking only of Europe?"

"No, but we face one urgency at a time. There are the occupied countries of the Pacific. One of our problems is to get information to the people in them that they have not been forgotten—that help will come when they have been liberated. We are trying various methods of keeping in touch with them, but in the meantime Europe is free, winter is coming, and millions will die of hunger and cold if relief does not race the frost and snow."

Clothes More Important Than Food

"Then clothes are as important as food?"

"Almost more important in some cases. You must remember that almost no civilian clothes have been made in Central Europe for five years."

"What about military uniforms? Could they not be made available to civilians?"

"They are worn out, too. It is not in the least likely that the two million French prisoners in Germany, for example, have had a new issue of clothing since June, 1940; and it must be the same story with the Belgians and the Dutch and the Poles and the Yugoslavs and the Greeks."

"And winter is coming."

Spraying with DDT

"Winter, and worse things than winter. Sicknesses of all kinds that the sudden collapse of Germany's military discipline is allowing to flare up again. Take malaria. With the destruction and neglect of the years of fighting and occupation, malaria has swept unchecked over Greece and 85 per cent. of the country is now malarious. UNRRA has a bold plan for controlling and eventually stamping out this disease, and it is to be controlled by an Australian. The Queensland Government has made the services of Sir Raphael Cilento available to UNRRA for this work and he is already in Europe. A spectacular part of the malaria control programme provides for the spraying of Greece's 1,000,000 acres of swampland with the powerful insecticide DDT to destroy mosquitoes. The spraying will be done from aeroplanes, which are now being obtained. If the whole programme is realised Greece may be free of one of its greatest evils for the first time in 3000 years."

"Do you find that people in general realise these things?"

"I think it would be more accurate to say that they know about them. They have read reports and heard public addresses, but they have nowhere become actively aware of the urgency of the situation."

"Is it the same in Australia as you find it here?"

"Just the same. Perhaps that is a confession I should not make, since I have

(continued on next page)