

A "D.P." IS DIFFICULT

One of UNRRA'S Major Problems



Spencer Digby photograph

MISS A. CONSTANCE DUNCAN (above), Chief Welfare Officer for UNRRA in the South-west Pacific Area, was in Wellington a few days ago, to assist with the final selection of CORSO teams for Greece, and *The Listener* took the opportunity to hear from her something about the human problems which UNRRA is helping to cope with in Europe at the present time.

The mental attitude of displaced persons, always known as "D.P.'s," is never necessarily helpful to their own welfare, Miss Duncan told us, and some are very unamenable to discipline; understandably so, since they have spent so long resisting it. Some will still accept no authority and will refuse to work.

We asked Miss Duncan what sort of reception was usually given to UNRRA on its first entering a country to start relief and rehabilitation work.

"We never go in without an invitation, and a definite signed agreement," she said.

Without Fear or Favour

"Do you meet political difficulties? Does either side, Left or Right, seem to suspect you?"

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She gave her first concert for fellow-prisoners in a shed with a single candle as the only light. That night, she and some of her audience wept at the sound of music.

After a year the Japanese decided that Dr. Mandl and Lili Kraus were innocent, and reunited them and their children. For the rest of the time they lived in a one-car garage with rats and cockroaches.

Lili Kraus was born in Budapest in 1908. She is essentially a classical pianist, interested in Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and Schubert, rather than the romantic and virtuoso composers. She began to play at six, and became a student at the Royal Academy in Budapest when she was eight. When she was 17, she had received the highest degrees.

"It is hard to say, but from reports one would say there's no suspicion, on the whole. It is always clearly stated in our agreements that there is to be no discrimination against race or creed or political belief, and UNRRA has neutral observers on the job all the time to see that this is carried out. Also all the staff have to give an undertaking to forswear national and sectional allegiance and become truly international servants. So everything possible is done to guard against misuse of UNRRA assistance."

One of the worst problems for the supply units is thieving. Miss Duncan's word for it was "colossal." At the Belsen hospital, blankets and sheets disappeared in huge numbers each month, and in the surrounding district one would see people dressed in good looking clothes with some resemblance to UNRRA bedclothes.

"They made charming overcoats," Miss Duncan said. "Then when displaced persons in Greece were being sent home on trucks (they took their animals, pigs, chickens and everything with them, and slept with them, too), a certain number of blankets would be provided, but by the end of the journey there would be only a few left; the rest would have gone in exchange for the local drink on the way."

Driving is Important

We talked of the qualifications required of UNRRA workers. Almost the first priority is ability to drive and keep a truck in running order and this applies to women as well as men. And at present, the Archimandrite of the Greek Church in New Zealand is trying to give some of our candidates a smattering of modern Greek. There is at least one soldier who has been in Greece in this war going back, whose Greek is said to be perfect.

"One thing about the drivers," Miss Duncan said, "is the rate they wear out their pants. The roads in Greece just aren't roads at all, and the drivers wear out the seats of their pants almost straight away. Those who don't have to sit prefer to stand."

She told us, too, about the great increase in malaria in Greece, against which steps are now being taken. Its incidence is up to 95 per cent of the people in some parts.

"But we've got some of the really top-notch sanitary engineers on the job. Colonel Wright, who is in charge of the engineering side, is the last surviving member of a team of engineers who worked on the Panama Canal."

New Zealand will be the last Empire country to send voluntary relief workers to Europe to work with UNRRA, and plans are now well advanced for sending four teams to Greece. It is hoped to put them on the next direct boat to the Middle East.

"People ask," said Miss Duncan, "why the cost of sending these teams doesn't come out of the New Zealand Government's contribution to the cost of UNRRA. The answer is that the teams are offered to UNRRA by the public through CORSO—the Council of Organisations for Relief Service Overseas—as an expression of New Zealand's sympathy for the distressed peoples of Europe."

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