

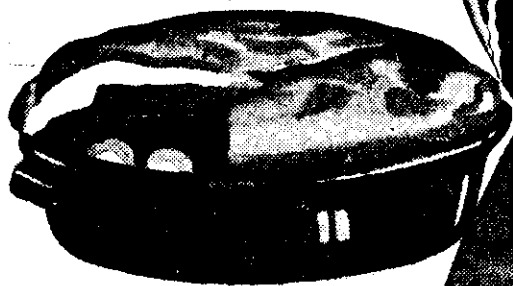
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IS LA GUARDIA RIGHT ABOUT CHINA?

Red Cross Doctor Speaks of Corruption and Civil Strife

THE announcement of F. H. La Guardia, Director-General of UNRRA, that the shipment of all relief supplies to China, except vital foods, is being stopped, probably came as a shock to many of us when we read it in our newspapers. But the decision merely recognises a situation, a "scandalous situation," which has existed in China for several months, according to Dr. Allan Dixon, of the British Red Cross and Order of St. John, who has just arrived in New Zealand after working in China.

As far as the interior of China is concerned, the withholding of further UNRRA supplies won't make much difference, at least not for some time, Dr. Dixon told *The Listener*. UNRRA shipments have been held up in Shanghai all along, and only a small percentage has been getting out into the interior. There were sufficient stocks now in Shanghai to maintain that trickle of supplies for some time. "The hold-up of ships and supplies in Shanghai has been a scandal for months. La Guardia's decision is not so much a political gesture as a practical necessity. There is no point in continuing to pile up supplies in the port if they can't be distributed. The ships and the goods might as well be sent somewhere else where they can do more good."

"Why can't they be distributed?" we asked.

"There are several reasons, but the great distances to be covered and the bad state of all forms of transport in China is the main one," said Dr. Dixon.

"Roads and railways are in a pretty hopeless state: roads especially, when it comes to large-scale transportation. One convoy of trucks going out into the interior in a week goes nowhere. It's not lack of trucks: UNRRA has trucks lying idle all over the country. It's the state of the roads. UNRRA has also been sending railway engines to China, but engines aren't any use without tracks, and there has been considerable destruction of the few lines that did exist before the war."

River Transport Would Help

Dr. Dixon mentioned that the cost of unloading cargo at Shanghai was very high: it had in fact been estimated as being as high as the cost of sending the cargo all the way from America.

"What is the solution? Or is there any solution?"

"The only way to speed up transportation to make more use of river boats. The main bulk of supplies in China must be carried by water, and it would make a difference if more ships were allowed up the Yangtze. Ocean-going ships could easily travel as far up the river as Hankow, and perhaps for another 100 miles. But the Chinese authorities don't seem keen to allow foreign flags up the Yangtze; possibly because Chinese shipowners would object."

Banditry was not such a serious obstacle to the distributors of relief supplies as might be supposed, continued Dr. Dixon. What was serious was thieving at the wharves. Shanghai seemed to be the worst port of all for that. When supplies were loaded off a ship on to lighters, there would be swarms of little junks all around, and goods disappeared at an astonishing rate. He knew a doctor who had had suitcases stolen from under his very nose while he was watching other luggage a little way off. Occasionally as much as a quarter of a whole cargo would be lost, most of it re-appearing later on the black market. The black market, of course, was one of the most important and disturbing factors in China to-day.

Chinese "Penicillin"

Mention of the black market reminded Dr. Dixon of the subject of penicillin: "The Chinese heard early about the discovery of this drug and started making their own. They put it up as a coloured liquid which perhaps may have had some useful psychological effect but certainly no bacteriological effect. In addition, genuine penicillin was in great demand on the black market, and there was also a big demand for empty bottles of the genuine variety; because they were filling the bottles up with some concoction or other and selling it under the original penicillin label. As a result we had to be careful at the hospital to destroy penicillin bottles. It was the same with whisky bottles: if they weren't destroyed you might easily get them sold back to you containing something that certainly wasn't whisky. 'Penicillin,' by the way, was used in China for every conceivable ailment from T.B. to housemaid's knee."

Nationalists v. Communists

We asked whether the conflict between the National Government and the Communists was affecting the distribution and allocation of UNRRA supplies. Dr. Dixon said that officially it made no difference, but in fact a vast proportion of the material went into Nationalist hands: that was because it had to enter China through Nationalist ports and travel through Nationalist-controlled territory to get to the Communists. At the few points where supplies did enter Communist territory there was a great deal of red tape to hold it up; all packages would be searched for hidden arms and so on.

Dr. Dixon added that he had been told that when any UNRRA supplies reached Communist areas, they went to the people who really needed them, whereas in Nationalist areas there was some ground for the complaint that a good proportion of supplies went to people who did not need them so much, to the Army, or on to the black market.

In short, what with one thing and another, La Guardia's decision to withhold further UNRRA supplies was quite understandable.