

A Marshall Plan for the Teaching Profession

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The Overseas Teacher-Relief Fund is doing a great deal for the teachers in war-devastated countries to restore confidence in themselves and their fellow man. Some thoughts of teachers and expressions of gratitude are reported by Lyle W. Ashby, associate director of the Division of Publications, NEA, and chairman of the NEA Staff Committee on the Overseas Teacher-Relief Fund.

LAST YEAR THE TEACHERS of the nation contributed over \$275,000 to aid the teachers of the war-devastated nations of the world through the Overseas Teacher-Relief Fund. The aid reached selected teachers in more than twenty-five nations in the form of food, clothing, books, and in a few cases enabled teachers in devastated countries to study in this country.

Each teacher who received aid through the Fund also received a letter from the executive secretary of the National Education Association, stat-

ing that the gift was a token of the goodwill of the teachers of America to all of the teachers of the recipient's nation. The letter stated that if the recipient of aid would write a letter to the NEA it would be forwarded in this country to a teacher or group of teachers who had contributed to the Fund so that correspondence and exchange of ideas might follow.

The Letters Pour In

In response to this suggestion many thousands of letters have been received



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from the teachers of Europe. These letters provide a rich source of material on the present-day thinking of the teachers of the war-devastated countries who, in the face of almost hopeless difficulties, are seeking to set a new generation of youth upon the path of peace, decency, and understanding.

All of these letters express tremendous gratitude. They are enthusiastic, to be sure, about the food and the clothing which they received in the packages. Since 1939, for the most part, they have not had the simple foods that we take for granted. Such things as milk, chocolate, sugar, and coffee are mentioned in almost every letter. Many of the writers say that words simply cannot express their gratitude for the simple physical help to be found in the food packages.

They Know That We Care

Even more touching, however, is their gratitude in the knowledge that the teachers of America have not forgotten them, that they have colleagues over here who wish to help them. This is true of the teachers of all of the nations into which aid went.

Teachers in the occupied countries were surprised and astonished to receive the packages from American teachers. One German teacher writes that the economic lift to the teacher receiving a package is tremendous. Then he says: "The first time that I was convinced of the goodwill of many of your nation was that day when we opened the Care parcel."

West of the iron curtain, teachers are greatly concerned about the menace of Communism. They are hoping and praying for the success of the Marshall Plan. Particularly do the teachers

in the occupied countries express the fear of Communism.

Letters from the iron curtain countries themselves are of course not outspoken along this line. Some of them remind us that they have to look both to the east and to the west, that they want to be friends with us, but that living as they do at the bloody crossroads of history their lot is also cast with the east. This may not be their choice but it is their fate. In the shifting tides of the gigantic tug and pull of the cold war it is fortunate that some of the people in between at least know that we care about their fate as human beings.

From many of the countries of Europe, the teachers' letters describe the incredible difficulties under which they teach. Consider the problem of trying to teach children whose lives have been warped by the war and its consequences, whose stomachs are still never full, whose clothing is in rags, who must literally forage for food and clothing.

There are certain unpleasant words which appear frequently in these letters: pneumonia and tuberculosis. The teachers themselves are the victims after years of undernourishment. So are their children, their parents, the children they teach. And there is another unpleasant word: blackmarket. Many of the things sent to them by the teachers in America are available to them only on the blackmarket and at prices which would require several months of their wages to buy.

Many of the teachers in the devastated countries have been forced to start over again with nothing. Every worldly possession they had was lost. Yet they still

have hope. They are determined to help the children on the pathway to what they hope will be a better life for them.

Many of the letters describe their own teaching situations at length and look forward with keen interest to the establishment of a correspondence with some American teacher.



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The Element of Hope

To show the attitude of the teachers who have received aid one can do no better than to quote one of the thousands of letters—such as the following portion of a letter from a teacher in Finland.

I work day after day, my mind is heavy with sorrow, due to the troubles here about our country. We received our mail today and among the letters was a surprising letter. Then with curiosity and awe we

opened it; as I read it through in a hurry, I was afraid to believe my eyes, and slowly it dawned upon me, that somewhere we have a friend who is extending her hand not only to me, but to our whole teachers association, to say lift your heads up, do not fall, let the light of love warm Finland.

When I received the package on March 12, I was speechless and I cannot thank you enough for it. When I opened the package I pulled out one important item after another, I could do nothing else but look at them with tears in my eyes. Knowing that distance makes no difference, and knowing that by your warm friendship we are in the midst of your thoughts. We know that you give confidence and love to all the teachers of Finland.

Again and again the letters say that the help of the teachers of America has restored their hope and their faith in the chance of a decent world. While the help we sent was small measured in terms of the astronomical figures of impersonal government aid, Paul French, executive director of Care upon returning recently from Europe said, "I am sure that nothing will have greater significance to the future of world democracy and international understanding than this inconspicuous act of sharing on the part of our teachers."

Raymond B. Fosdick recently pointed out that what has been bombed out and broken down is not so much a smoothly running economic mechanism as it is man's confidence in himself and in his fellow men, that we must find ways of dealing with the spiritual hunger of the world, that we must devise a Marshall Plan for dealing with these shortages.

The Overseas Teacher-Relief Fund has been a kind of Marshall Plan for our profession. We have given bread and cloth and books, but more important we have given faith and hope and courage around the world.

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