

As you ~~know~~ the idea expounded in the paper  
herewith would go down well with the  
Americans? And has it in your view any  
merit of its own? It springs from the mind  
of a colleague of mine - Ed. Martin - in  
the North; with his I would be much  
pleased if you could somewhere be benefited  
of your comments.

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FUNCTIONS AND ORGANISATION OF AN INTERNATIONAL FOOD OFFICE

1. The idea of an International Food Office. In a great deal of current discussion, both in this country and in the United States, there is an underlying assumption that something will be done after the war to see that the peoples of the world are adequately fed. This belief derives directly from the "freedom from want" principle of the Atlantic Charter - a freedom to be assured to "all men in all lands." Two further factors have lent it powerful support: the deep interest felt in food questions in almost every country as a consequence of rationing, and in some cases semi-starvation; and the growing realisation that modern nutritional science can vastly improve the physical development, health and well-being of peoples.

Up to the present no specific proposals have been put forward to implement the "freedom from want" principle. The International Clearing Union, the International Commodity Controls, and the emphasis upon expansionist policy in the Mutual Aid Agreement will all tend to have this effect. But from the point of view of the man in the street and on the farm these are abstruse and remote considerations. An International Food Office, dedicated to the proposition that the people of the world shall be fed, is something concrete and practical, which everyone can understand. Since it is necessary to secure popular support for the post-war settlement, as well as to make it economically sound, there is much to be said in favour of the general idea of an International Food Office. The object of this paper is to consider what functions such an Office might fulfil and how it would be organised.

2. "International Clerking". The first and most obvious function of an International Food Office is what an American newspaper once called "international clerking." This includes such matters as setting up international standards; acting as a clearing-house of information; compilation of world statistics of food production, stocks and consumption; initiation and co-ordination of research; application of scientific knowledge to backward countries; nutritional education; propagation of new methods for the practical application of nutritional principles; together with the publications, enquiries, committees and conferences entailed.

This type of international work can only be done by a permanent official organisation. Ad hoc international conferences have at best a spasmodic influence, are often inadequately prepared, and create a lamentable impression should they break down. Private international organisations lack funds, prestige and expertise. In a post-war world, attempting to preserve peace by international co-operation, something in the nature of an International Food Office is a virtual certainty. The real question is, does the I.F.O. stop short at "international clerking"?

3. World Surpluses. Of other international functions which world opinion would make it difficult for the I.F.O. to ignore, the most inescapable is the disposal of world food surpluses.

If, as is to be expected, an expansionist monetary and financial policy is followed in all or most of the economically advanced countries, and especially if an International Clearing Union imparts an expansionist bias to international trade, it is unlikely that food surpluses will occur on anything like the scale experienced in the 1930's. On the other hand, imperfect national control, variable harvests, fluctuations in world demand and other factors may at times raise problems which are greater than the buffer stocks of the International Commodity Controls can conveniently handle. Furthermore, surpluses may arise of foods not covered by controls. If the I.F.O. stepped in and took over such surpluses as could not otherwise be dealt with, a ~~three~~-fold purpose would be ~~be~~ served. For one thing it would meet a great psychological need. World opinion has been profoundly shocked by the destruction of food surpluses (wheat, maize, coffee, cocoa, etc.). Food has symbolical as well as nutritional significance. The "plain man" feels that there must be something fundamentally wrong with a régime that destroys food when elsewhere in the world men, women and children are going hungry. An international organisation designed to secure that this should not happen would make a strong appeal. In the second place, with the I.F.O. underpinning the International Commodity Controls in the disposal of surpluses, the argument in favour of restrictionist methods (e.g. export quotas, limiting the amount of food that can be made available on the world market) would lose their validity. This is important, in that it would help to prevent private interests entrenching themselves behind such schemes and mulcting the general public.

Finally, there is the use of such surpluses for the feeding of peoples who have encountered economic disaster such as a crop failure, a veering of world demand away from their products, or some natural cataclysm. It is to be expected that after the war there will be an increasing number of self-governing or quasi-self-governing areas of the mandate type; which from time to time will need such international assistance.

These arguments for a central organisation dealing with food surpluses must not be allowed to disguise the fact that considerable difficulties would be encountered in applying any such policy. Great care would have to be taken to secure that, in giving food relief, normal trading was not interfered with unduly. By seeing to it that supplies went to completely impoverished people, and by routing relief as far as possible through normal trade channels, this problem could probably be solved. The American Blue Stamp plan has already shown this to be feasible on a national scale. The surpluses work of the I.F.O. would in fact be an application of the Blue Stamp principle internationally. But there is another and much more fundamental difficulty. This is that in a number of countries any increase in the food supply is rapidly followed by additional mouths to feed. There is no ready-made or short-cut solution to this problem of the pressure of population upon resources. It is a matter of raising the whole educational and cultural status of the peoples in question. In the meantime it would be necessary to confine relief to those instances where crop failure or some other extraordinary event made special relief necessary.

4. Equal access to world markets. The I.F.O. might also contribute to the solution of one of the most difficult economic problems of the post-war period. The Atlantic Charter promises to all countries access on equal terms to the trade of the world. Article 7 of the Mutual Aid Agreement prescribes "the elimination of all forms of discriminatory treatment in international commerce." Many countries, in particular the United Kingdom, will find it very difficult to carry out these provisions. By the end of the war certain areas previously undeveloped industrially (in particular the East and Latin America) will probably possess greatly increased manufacturing capacity. To permit countries using modern equipment but paying mediaeval wages to undercut high-standard countries on the world market is liable to have a number of untoward results. For one thing, employment, wages and working conditions in the export trades of the high-standard countries will suffer. For another, there will be mushroom industrial development in the low-standard countries, with highly undesirable social consequences as peasants are herded into the factories to provide the necessary cheap labour. In the end the "discriminatory treatment" clause of the Mutual Aid Agreement will break under the strain unless something is done to make it workable.

What is needed is to secure that "access on equal terms" to the trade of the world shall be on genuinely equal terms and not weighted in favour of the low-standard producer. This entails some control of the wages paid in industries purveying to the world market. The most practical way of doing this is to prescribe that, as a condition of securing equal access to world markets, such industries shall pay wages sufficient to provide a minimum standard of nutrition in the country concerned. This would still permit the economically backward countries to improve their international trade position to an extraordinary degree, but it would prevent in large measure the undercutting of high-standard countries and the social abuses consequent upon over-rapid industrialisation. It can hardly be too strongly emphasised that unless special action of this kind is taken, the "equal access" principle of the Atlantic Charter and the "discriminatory treatment" clause of the Mutual Aid Agreement stand very little chance of being honoured. There is perhaps no single factor more likely to drive a wedge between the United States and the United Kingdom in the post-war period.

This proposal that the I.F.O. should establish nutritional standards on which an International Wages Convention might be based, bristles with difficulties. But the alternative is disaster. What is suggested here is that instead of wages in low-standard countries being whatever pittance ex-peasants may be forced to accept, a bottom shall be put to wages in industries manufacturing for the world market at that rate necessary to provide adequate nutrition in the country in question. Needless to say, wage rates so based would be less in Eastern countries (with their cheap diet of rice, soya beans, dried fish etc.) than in the West. This would still give these low-standard countries considerable competitive advantage on the world market, but not the overwhelming advantage they would otherwise enjoy. What such action would amount to in sum is that, in place of the pre-war situation where low-standard (e.g. Japanese) producers paid starvation wages and were shut out of

most markets by heavy tariffs and/or quotas, they and their like would now have access to these markets but would have to pay an 'international' wage based upon nutritional considerations. Failure to do this would involve the withdrawal of the "equal access" privilege.

5. World Food Production. Finally, there is the still broader question of organising world food supplies so that, in literal fact, for "all men in all lands" there shall be "freedom from want." Even the economically advanced countries of the world are still far from providing sufficient food for the whole of their people. In the less advanced countries, only a fraction of the population have a diet adequate for health. To remedy this not only must food be distributed more equitably in the different countries (essentially a national matter), but there must be a far greater production of food - particularly of the more nutritious foods - in the world as a whole.

One way of helping to bring this about would be to secure that development loans made under the auspices of the International Clearing Union were given largely for purposes designed to raise the nutritional status of the country in question. It is often automatically assumed that development loans must necessarily be for the setting up of factories. They might equally well, perhaps preferably, be devoted to improving the food supply, qualitatively as well as quantitatively (fencing of land, road-making, irrigation, better breeds, testing stations, agricultural institutes etc.) It would be the function of the I.F.O. to examine how this could be done, to make recommendations for development loans having this aim in view, and to see that loans were put to the nutritional purposes prescribed.

6. Organisation. The form of organisation of the I.F.O. necessary depends upon what functions it assumes. If it stops short at the "clerking" stage it need only be one department of some general international office covering a variety of other technical questions such as health, communications, transport etc. If it goes beyond the "clerking" stage into the political arena of surpluses, of international trade and/or of development loans it would require a separate status.

It is not necessary here to enter into the detailed organisation of the I.F.O. as an autonomous body, but on one point the experience of the International Labour Office might usefully be taken into account. Perhaps the strongest feature of the International Labour Office lies in the fact that by reason of its tripartite form of organisation (Government delegates, employers' delegates and workers' delegates) it represents not only governments but, to some extent, peoples. The I.F.O. might adapt this idea to its own special circumstances. One way of doing this would be to set up a National Nutritional Council in each Member State. These Councils would be based upon a National Nutritional Society, or federation of societies, having the widest possible membership, embracing particularly nutritionists, economists, social scientists, and others technically interested in problems of feeding and nutrition. The National Nutritional Councils would be given a quasi-official status in that they would nominate one of their representatives to attend the conferences of the International Food Office, such representative to have the same speaking and voting rights as the Government representative. By this means, centres of nutritional activity would be set up in each country, and at the same time the I.F.O. would bring to its meetings delegates of independent standing who in some measure could speak directly for the consumer.

7. Questions for settlement. If it be assumed that, in principle, an International Food Office of some kind is desirable, three main questions arise:

- (i) What should be its scope?
- (ii) When should it be constituted?
- (iii) What is the "next step"?

No attempt will be made here to answer these questions, but there are certain aspects of them which may usefully be brought out.

As regards scope two supplementary questions are relevant. Is it better to have the I.F.O. merely a department of some omnibus international office, or would it work more effectively as an autonomous body? If an I.F.O. is set up, could it possibly turn a blind eye to the complementary problems of destruction of food surpluses in some parts of the world and acute want resulting from crop failure etc. in others?

As regards timing, there is the point that if the I.F.O. were set up, even in embryonic form, before the end of the war it could act in an advisory capacity to the Relief and Rehabilitation Administration; furthermore it would then be sufficiently developed to take over from the R.R.A. when the time came for that body to close down.

As regards the "next step" the most important question is whether the project should be included in the Anglo-American conversations provided for under the Mutual Aid Agreement; and if so, what is the best way of getting it upon the Agenda?