

# Public Assistance Concepts in an International Agency

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*The International Refugee Organization, after more than four years of operation as one of the specialized agencies of the United Nations, is to be terminated in October of this year. Now seems an appropriate time, therefore, to consider the new meaning given to the phrase "international social work" through the operations of the Organization and those of its predecessor—the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration—in caring for the millions of persons displaced by World War II.*

*The Social Security Administration has had a more than professional interest in the IRO. Personnel from the Administration were on the IRO staff, and the Commissioner for Social Security, Arthur J. Altmeyer, acted as Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission.*

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**I**NTERNATIONAL social work is a phrase that has been used frequently during the past few years. Seemingly it means one thing to one person in the United States, something else to another; to persons in other countries the phrase may have still other meanings. Within these variations is there a body of common concepts of social work—a kind of international common denominator—that can be applied anywhere and everywhere that work is done with people in need of assistance and services?

Some part, at least, of an answer to the question was found when social workers from many different countries worked together in the International Refugee Organization, Department of Health, Care and Maintenance, Welfare Division. Social workers from the United States were especially interested in finding out which of the policies and concepts developed by the Social Security Administration for administering the State-Federal programs of assistance are applicable in assisting needy, helpless, and stranded people in nearly every part of the world.

It was almost immediately evident

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that there were some common concepts in social work—concepts that had developed through long and varied experience in voluntary and religious agencies and in government programs in various foreign countries. In the application of these common concepts and in the application of the more specifically American concepts and principles, there was a wide range of difference.

To understand the background against which the question has been answered in the work of the IRO, it is necessary to have clearly in mind that agency's scope and responsibilities. There can be no better way to give these than to quote from the preamble of the Constitution, approved by resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 15, 1946.

The Governments accepting this Constitution,

#### RECOGNIZING:

that genuine refugees and displaced persons constitute an urgent problem which is international in scope and character;

that as regards displaced persons, the main task to be performed is to encourage and assist in every way possible their early return to their country of origin;

that genuine refugees and displaced persons should be assisted by international action, either to return to their countries of nationality or former habitual residence, or to find new homes elsewhere, under the conditions provided for in this Constitution . . .

that re-settlement and re-establishment of refugees and displaced persons be contemplated only in cases indicated clearly in the Constitution; that genuine refugees and displaced persons, until such time as their repatriation or re-settlement and re-establishment is effectively completed, should be protected in their rights and legitimate interests, should receive care and assistance and, as far as possible, should be put to useful employment in order to avoid the evil and anti-social consequences of continued idleness; and

that the expenses of repatriation to the extent practicable should be charged to Germany and Japan for persons displaced by those Powers from countries occupied by them:

#### HAVE AGREED:

for the accomplishment of the foregoing purposes in the shortest possible time, to establish and do hereby establish a nonpermanent organization to be called the International Refugee Organization, a specialized agency to be brought into relationship with the United Nations . . .

the functions of the Organization to be carried out in accordance with the purposes and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, shall be: the repatriation; the identification, registration and classification; the care and assistance; the legal and political protection; the transport; and the re-settlement and re-establishment, in countries able and willing to receive them, of persons who are the concern of the Organization under the provisions of Annex I.

Annex I of the Constitution defines "refugees" and "displaced persons" and is, in effect, a book of instructions to the IRO. The amount of thought that went into it is impres-

sive; quite obviously the authors saw with great clearness what they wanted the Organization to do and with equal clearness some of the things they did not want it to do. They foresaw, too, many of the difficulties, including those of definitions and interpretations, that would have to be made. It was fortunate that they set down in black and white some of these principles as rules binding the Organization. Many times this action saved the administration of the IRO from what would have been serious disagreements and even impasses. Though lawyers later found fault with some of the provisions, there was general agreement that the detailed provisions were on the whole good and that the underlying principles and concepts were excellent.

Annex I was useful, also, in reiterating and emphasizing that it should be the concern of the IRO that "no bona fide and deserving refugee or displaced person" should be deprived of such assistance as it could give; and that its solutions respecting persons and families should be "rapid and positive" and "just and equitable to all concerned." These statements were life-saving criteria in many a discussion involving different points of view and the emotions wrought by war. Another contribution of Annex I was its specific recommendation that "to ensure the impartial and equitable application" of principles and definitions, some special semi-judicial machinery be created—in other words, an appeal board.

In the beginning it was estimated that there were approximately 1.5 million stranded or displaced persons within the mandate of the International Refugee Organization. Actually, 1,496,434 persons were found eligible for the services of the Organization from July 1, 1947, to September 30, 1950, while about 400,000 persons applied for and were denied its services. Though most of the refugees were in 11 European countries, some were found in China, East Africa, India, Lebanon, and the Philippines.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Services and assistance were given to refugees and displaced persons in Austria, Belgium, China, Denmark, East Africa, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Portugal, Spain, Syria, Turkey.

Work was begun under a Preparatory Commission, and the fully formed International Refugee Organization came into existence when 15 States had signed the Constitution and met the required financial responsibilities.<sup>2</sup>

Obviously, a tremendous number of specialized skills were required in the personnel of an organization that was to carry out the orders of the United Nations. The work needed lawyers, doctors, experts in transportation, specialists in the purchase of supplies, auditors, persons who knew how to prepare budgets, interpreters, statisticians, educators, dietitians, and others.

From the beginning, social work was recognized as one of the most important of these skills. Social workers were inherited from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration or recruited from many countries, most of them from the 18 that finally became IRO members. Since the apportionment of personnel bore a fairly close ratio to the financial contributions that these countries made to the Organization, most of the social workers were recruited from Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United States, and the United Kingdom. But there were also substantial numbers from other countries, including New Zealand, Norway, and Sweden.

Naturally, these workers had had different kinds and degrees of training. They were drawn from various specialized fields of social and welfare work. They differed in their early education, in their familiarity with languages, in their national prejudices and outlooks. Thus, they came to their tasks with widely varying experience and backgrounds. There were both men and women in the group; most of them were between 25 and 50 years

<sup>2</sup> Member nations finally numbered 18. Members without reservation: Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, France, Guatemala, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Venezuela. Signatories to the Constitution, but with ratification incomplete: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Honduras, Liberia, Panama, Peru, and the Philippines. Representatives of these countries are present at Council meetings as observers.

of age. They were not, however, quite so heterogeneous a group as the foregoing statements might imply, for they had been chosen with care, had some common professional concepts, were in sympathy with IRO aims, and the greater number had a common European background.

Many of them were required, of course, to work in strange settings. A few were on headquarters staff, located in Geneva, but they frequently made field trips. Some worked out of the IRO national headquarters in sovereign countries, and others were stationed in local offices. Some spent all or most of their time in countries they knew or were natives of. Some were assigned to camps or centers where displaced persons or refugees were assembled. Some were in countries that had been on the side of the Allies; some were in liberated countries; others were in the occupied zones of ex-enemy countries. Their duties ran the gamut of everything that a social worker has ever been asked to do—and included some, perhaps, that no social worker had ever before been asked to do. Nevertheless, the problems they dealt with were still the problems of human beings in need of some kind of guidance, advice, or assistance. The milieu of their operations was extraordinary, and the solutions were often without precedent.

European social workers were often not familiar with many of the social work principles and procedures that seem basic to Americans. Some of them had been used to more authoritarian approaches and were ready to insist that their own suggestions and plans be accepted by the person needing help. It was hard, too, for a social worker of one nationality to be as objective and professional in dealing with the refugees and displaced persons of certain other nationalities as the United Nations clearly meant the IRO to be.

The question was not only one of national prejudices, but also one of inexperience in understanding and assisting persons of habits and cultures different from their own. Then, too, there were historical ties and sympathies that would creep into the picture; in other words, both likes and dislikes influenced attitudes. Ob-

vious, also, were the consequences of German occupation of France, of the Low Countries, of Norway and Denmark. Indeed, many IRO staff members themselves had been imprisoned or interned. It was inevitable that the result was often to make attitudes toward emigration from Germany and Austria emotional rather than professional and objective. At the same time, there were many European social workers who felt a deep conviction of the dignity of a human being, no matter what his circumstances might be and no matter what his background may have been.

In this area the experience of staff from the Federal Security Agency with the problems of State-Federal relationships had some special value. IRO headquarters in Geneva was in a position somewhat analogous to that of the national office of the Federal Security Agency in Washington. It was in charge of a program involving the governments of sovereign countries and occupied territories that had their own laws, regulations, and plans and that participated in the financing of their own program and the total program of care, maintenance, and services to refugees. The Americans were used to varying patterns and ways of life, to say nothing of varying State plans for public welfare, and were accustomed to making adjustments among different desires and ways of life.

The interplay of the forces, problems, and personalities involved will become both clearer and more interesting if the huge job of the IRO is considered in terms of its component operations. Possibly the most typical operations in the field of social work concern eligibility, fair hearing, safeguarding of information, counseling, freedom of choice, suitable home, residence, unrestricted money payment, standard of need, client participation, and State-Federal relations.

Throughout the article, reference is made to Social Security Administration policy on these and related questions to bring out similarities and differences in approach and in practice.

### *Eligibility*

The basic procedures for the establishment of eligibility under the IRO

program were written in its early days and have held throughout the program, although interpretations and instructions based on experience, new information, and changing circumstances were issued from time to time.

These procedures embodied a number of the principles that have been established in this country under the Social Security Act. To be approved for the purpose of Federal grants-in-aid, under the policies developed by the Bureau of Public Assistance, a State plan for public assistance must identify the conditions of eligibility; indicate the sources of factual information acceptable as a basis for establishing eligibility and provide for at least one interview with the applicant; identify the conditions of eligibility subject to change; and assure that no one is denied the opportunity to apply for assistance. Establishment of eligibility is considered the joint responsibility of the agency and the applicant; the primary source of information is the applicant.

To benefit from the services of the IRO, each refugee or displaced person applied in person or in writing, and the organization determined, under the terms of the Constitution, his eligibility for all or some of those services. No groups were adjudged eligible as groups.

National leaders of the refugees, voluntary societies, and the press had given wide publicity to the establishment of the IRO, and as soon as the preliminary administrative structure was set up, a flood of applications for assistance was received in all countries concerned. Immediate steps were taken, therefore, to advise the field staff as to eligibility requirements. The scope had been broadly outlined in the Constitution, but the application process, the interview, the types of sources of information acceptable for determination of eligibility, the necessity for providing a process whereby continuing status of eligibility could be guaranteed, and the method by which these people could "be protected in their rights and legitimate interests" needed immediate definition and clarification.

The application process consisted of five elements:

1. The applicant was provided with

all necessary information concerning IRO services and requirements.

2. If the applicant decided to make formal application for one or more services, he filled out and signed an application blank, which the IRO pledged to hold confidential except for administrative purposes or to use with the applicant if necessary for future emigration purposes.

3. The primary source of information was the applicant, and he was expected to produce his own documents and proof of eligibility. The eligibility officers gave such assistance as the applicant requested or needed, but it was supplementary. The applicant was fully informed that his statements would be checked against existing records, both civil and military. The Constitution explicitly excluded from the program quislings, traitors, and war criminals; it also provided that "nothing should be done to prevent in any way their surrender and punishment" and that "IRO assistance be not exploited in order to encourage subversive or hostile activities directed against the governments of any of the United Nations."

4. Continuous review of eligibility was not carried on for all displaced persons and refugees declared within the mandate of the IRO. Instead, special and individual interviews and hearings were held when new information or new records came to light relating to the activities of persons or groups during the war and immediately thereafter.

5. The applicant was given a card stating plainly that he was not within the mandate of the IRO or that he was within the mandate, in which case the card listed the types of services for which he was eligible.<sup>3</sup>

### *Fair Hearing*

One of the important and far-reaching provisions of the Social Security Act relating to public assistance is the requirement that an applicant whose claim has been denied

<sup>3</sup> Agreements with the governments of the various countries in which the refugees were situated ensured that bearers of these IRO documents were accorded "best favored nation" treatment. In other words, the documents permitted the refugees to move, within certain limits, freely about the country.

must be given an opportunity for a fair hearing. This principle was accepted by the IRO.

At the time of the IRO's initial ruling on eligibility, the individual whose application was denied for all or any services was advised of his right to a hearing before an eligibility appeal board that was independent of the administrative machinery in the areas of operation. The Appeal Board, which was responsible directly to the Director General, was located in Geneva. Members of the board traveled in circuit to the areas for hearings, since refugees and displaced persons usually had no travel documents, and currency difficulties presented an added and almost insuperable obstacle.

The hearings were numerous, since being declared "eligible" or "within the mandate of the IRO" carried legal and political protection, and, for most refugees, the right to services, assistance, and resettlement. All hearings were carefully recorded, and provision was made for a second appeal in case the refugee found new data or new evidence to support his application.

The Appeal Board circulated examples of their findings to the eligibility officers, so that they had a body of material to assist and guide them.

### *Safeguarding Information*

A new approach in the United States to the rights of persons receiving public assistance was signaled by the provision written into the Social Security Act in 1939. This provision forbids the use or disclosure of information regarding applicants for assistance except for purposes directly connected with the administration of the public assistance programs.

The IRO also placed great emphasis on confidentiality of information. The basic application—the "eligibility document"—was held as confidential according to the pledge that had been given to the refugees and displaced persons when the first applications were made. These people had been interviewed and reinterviewed, screened and rescreened, by civil and military authorities until they were thoroughly tired of it. They were fearful as well; indeed, many were in a state of panic through fear of

persecution by those from whom they had fled. These documents were therefore kept in a folder separate from other records—health, social, educational, and the like. They were used only with the refugee if necessary for resettlement purposes. So strict was the rule concerning confidentiality of records that the records were kept under lock and key, and only international staff of a supervisory grade could alter a record or use it with an immigration officer.

### *Counseling*

In the summer of 1948, it became apparent that more detailed knowledge of the characteristics of the remaining IRO caseload was essential for purposes of planning. The mass repatriation movements had been completed, and reports from the field indicated that many families had been rejected for emigration by more than one selection mission because of illness in the family, age, the number of dependents in relation to the number of wage earners, irregular marital relations, or some other reason. The Welfare Division therefore instituted a "counseling" program, with the aim of interviewing and building a case record on all families or individuals who apparently were unable to emigrate. The project started with the more obvious groups—the aged, ill, or institutionalized; unmarried mothers; and widows or widowers with young children. Here, too, the pattern followed was one familiar to American social workers—individual interviews, explanation of the confidentiality of records, encouragement of the client to state his problem and make his own choice of possible solutions, and referral of the client to specialized services of the IRO and to those available in the country of present residence through either public or private agencies.

The techniques for this counseling service were based on the principles and procedures already used in the application and determination-of-eligibility processes, described above, and those developed by the Bureau of Public Assistance. Later, this counseling procedure was adopted for use by the resettlement officers so that each refugee or displaced person could be interviewed individually; ad-

vised fully of the choices open to him in repatriation, resettlement, or special services; and be given an opportunity to state his choice. If he made no choice or did not utilize the available services, he was informed that he was, in effect, electing to remain in whatever circumstances he might find himself when the IRO closed. He was, moreover, under no compulsion to remain under the protection of the IRO.

### *Freedom of Choice*

The IRO operated a variety of rehabilitative, health, and educational programs, as did many international voluntary societies operating overseas, many local voluntary agencies, and a number of European governments. These services included—especially in the IRO operations in Germany, Austria, and Italy—an elaborate health and sanatoria program, medical rehabilitation centers, schools, vocational training services, legal offices, language-training schools, and child welfare and casework services. Referral was made to the appropriate service, either to improve the client's chances for resettlement or assist him in his future life in his country of present residence. The advantages and disadvantages connected with the referral were pointed out to the client; the choice was his.

This concept was a difficult one for certain of the European workers to accept. They agreed to the eligibility and application procedure, not because of the basic principle involved but because "a refugee and his records must be protected; he may have relatives behind the Iron Curtain; quislings will locate him," and so on. Choice was something else again. When the question was one of specialized services and emigration as opposed to the refugee's remaining where he was, the attitude was sometimes dogmatic. "He must go and learn a trade; they must get married; he must reunite with the rest of the family; he must undergo medical rehabilitation; he must emigrate here, there or yonder." Why? Because, the workers were convinced, "It is best for him. We know best." The supervisors were, on the whole, successful in combating this feeling, and there was little difficulty, eventually,

in implementing the principle that "it must be the client's own choice," arrived at after full knowledge and discussion of the pros and cons.

When the first interviewing for eligibility began, and later when an interview was conducted for the analysis of the characteristics of the caseload, each refugee head of a family—man or woman—defined to the interviewer his "family"; he and the group decided this question between themselves. The group might be a "family" in the commonly accepted meaning of the word; an older son might assume the position of "head"; sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, aunts, uncles, grandparents were often included. During the wanderings and migrations, families had become separated by national boundaries, parents had died, and, as a result, new unions and families had been set up without legal or religious regularization, which was indeed often impossible to effect.

With such situations the IRO did not interfere except (1) to assist if the adults requested legal services in order to establish presumption of death, to obtain a divorce from a spouse who had remained in the homeland, or to regularize their union; and (2) to advise the group as to problems in regard to resettlement in certain countries if the size and composition of the "family" group did not conform to the immigration policy of that country or if regularization of the union was essential to resettlement to the country chosen.

### *Suitable Home*

In postwar Europe the IRO faced some of the problems raised by the concept of "suitable homes." Large numbers of unaccompanied children and youth had been placed in installations set aside solely for their use by UNRRA. These "children's homes" and "youth centers" were continued by the IRO pending placement of each child on an individualized basis. But during the period of wandering, many other unaccompanied children and youth had attached themselves to families to which they may not have been related, and these children had not been turned over to UNRRA. During the two interviewing programs mentioned above, many children and

youth were found in these circumstances; for each of those children an individual case record was made, and an immediate search for relatives was instituted.

At the same time, the Child Search Branch of the International Tracing Service was locating unaccompanied children and youth who had been placed by the Hitler regime in German and Austrian families or who had been picked up and cared for by these families.

It was when working with these two groups—children and youth living with refugee families and in German and Austrian families—that the struggle arose concerning the concept of suitable home. With it came all the related problems familiar to welfare and child welfare workers—the families' and the child's emotional relationship; the demands of relatives; the demands—legal and otherwise—of the countries of origin; the rules and regulations of the occupying authorities; the position of the clergy of the church with which the child was affiliated; legal guardianship. In this area there appeared little or no conflict between the concepts and principles of American and European child welfare workers. Painstakingly, carefully, over months and years, they documented and analyzed the cases and conferred with child and parents and relatives, attempting to work out a suitable and feasible plan with as little heartbreak as possible.

### *Residence*

It is now accepted policy in public assistance administration in the United States that the choice of the place where an individual lives or resides is one that he makes for himself.

The IRO also had this problem of residence and in an aggravated form. The refugees, however, were not living freely or even normally; they were where fate had flung them or where governments of good will gave them sanctuary. They had become or made themselves stateless; they had no passports or valid travel documents. Theoretically, they were free to find a home or room to live in and, in some areas and countries, a job. The IRO imposed no restriction on

movement within the laws, rules, and regulations in effect in the sovereign state or occupied territory.

There were, therefore, refugees living in houses or rooms of their own choice, even in Germany and Austria. About half the persons making up the caseload in Italy, one-third of them in the French Zone of Germany, and all in Belgium, China, France, Lebanon, and the Netherlands lived wherever they chose. No question was raised concerning this freedom of movement, and many of the refugees applied for and received passports to cross national borders on business or to see relatives. In Germany and Austria, however, no provision, under the statutes of the occupying authorities, could be made for care and maintenance except in camps operated by the IRO, though other services were granted on application. As a result, the refugee who could not find a job and a place to live had perforce to enter a camp.

### *Unrestricted Money Payment*

Before 1933, assistance to needy persons in the United States was frequently given in the form of assistance in kind, such as grocery orders and rent orders. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration and the Social Security Act substituted the principle of the unrestricted money payment. The amount of the payment is based on the recipient's need, but the use of the payment is his right and his responsibility; like any other self-respecting member of the community, he determines how he shall use his money.

A mass relief program, such as the operation of refugee camps, must rely on assistance in kind. Where possible, however, the IRO employed money payments.

Money payments were made to refugees living out of camp who were in need. In Belgium, France, the Netherlands, and Switzerland and in northern Italy and the Middle East there were no camps as such, and the refugees moved about freely within the boundaries of the country, had more or less freedom to work, and received cash assistance in the form of an unrestricted money payment on a basis of need. The children were subject to the local school at-

tendance and work permit regulations. Indeed, in many instances, the countries encouraged and aided the youth to attend trade schools, colleges, and universities; and the IRO provided care and maintenance for any bona fide student in all areas of operation.

The concept of the unrestricted money payment was not entirely agreed upon by all workers. There was a strong tendency on the part of many workers—both European and American—to instruct or supervise the refugees in their expenditures. In discussions of this concept, these workers would evade the basic principle or issue and would fall back on age-old arguments, such as “there is so little money,” “the public will object,” and, finally, “the Constitution says they shall not exploit the resources of the agency.” Many of the workers were of two minds concerning refugees and their handling of money; they tended to be overly protective and somewhat emotional on the subject and at the same time to be suspicious of the refugee’s motives and his ability to manage his own affairs.

In practice, most of the refugees enjoyed an unrestricted money payment. The reason was that there were not enough social workers to make regular home visits to refugees scattered throughout the towns and villages, rather than a conviction on the part of the workers concerning the refugees’ right to manage their own funds.

### *Standard of Need*

Determination of need presented the same difficulties in the IRO as in a State public welfare agency in the United States. The State assistance plans must provide that the payment be based on determination of the amount of assistance needed. If assistance funds are not sufficient to meet all need, the plan must include a method of adjusting individual payments that can be applied throughout the State and will be in effect in all localities.

The two methods used in the camps by the IRO to provide aid—cash assistance on a basis of need and assistance in kind—were both difficult of regulation and administration. Fi-

nancial limitations, the completely unpredictable number of refugees to be served, the familiar question of preferential treatment for refugees in standards of food and medical care—all vexed and harassed the Organization in every area of operation.

How to give similar treatment in similar circumstances was a serious problem. In Germany, for example, there were 8 million “refugees” not within the mandate of IRO; the civilian population received food computed on a varied caloric scale, and the IRO was under instructions from the occupying authorities not to exceed, in its food for refugees, the level accorded the nationals—a level that was most difficult to determine. Moreover, the nationals could, presumably, augment income and food in a variety of ways. The French and British Zones had their own methods of computation. The IRO was able, however, with a few exceptions, to standardize the clothing and amenity issues, the food for vulnerable groups, and the cash allowance and to bring the basic food issue into some degree of conformity with that of the nationals.

In France, where earlier legislation had established a set sum for assistance for refugees, the problem of preferential treatment presented itself again but in a new aspect. France had not participated in the UNRRA program and had worked out its own procedure for refugee care. Refugees were listed in four main categories—the “old” or *statutaire* group (for example, the Russian émigrés of 1918–22 and the Armenian refugees), who had rights and privileges established by statute; Spanish refugees; refugees who had arrived before or during World War II; and the “neo” refugees, who began coming across the open French border in 1946–47.

The first two groups received preferential treatment in cash assistance; this assistance was higher than that accorded to nationals under the French social security system. The World War II refugees received assistance administered by voluntary agencies under agreement with the IRO and the French Government. The rate of assistance was set arbitrarily within the grant made to France and in some relation to the

number of refugees; there was no over-all standard except as an agency set one, and several did not. “Neo” refugees received inferior assistance, since no funds were available for their use and reliance had to be placed on local agencies and unexpended funds. Frequently emergency measures had to be taken by the IRO to help new refugees who were not assisted by the French Government.

After long and complicated negotiations, including an inquiry into the cost of living and local assistance standards, the four caseloads were merged into one, and the task of setting up individual case records and determining the scale of grants was placed in the hands of one agency—the *Société Social aux Émigrés*. It was difficult to point out the fallacy and pitfalls inherent in the system of preferential treatment over a long period of years for persons in similar circumstances, but the leaders in Government, the *Société Social aux Émigrés*, the church groups, and the French office of the IRO took a stand for similar treatment for all groups and held it firmly through all the pressures brought by special interest groups and, indeed, by groups of refugees. In all fairness, it should be said that the level of assistance was so low and funds so inadequate that the temptation was great to save on or eliminate an item in one grant in order to give some little something to a new applicant. The margin in which a relief organization could move was far narrower than in the United States.

In other areas of operation in which a cash grant was made, a fixed scale was used for the grant. The scale varied from country to country and from time to time, but there was general agreement that the Organization should set and maintain a standard that would preclude preferential treatment for any family or group.

### *Participation of the Client*

There is much talk by social workers in all fields concerning the participation of the client in any assistance program and the necessity for an agency to take into consideration the needs and opinions of the persons who use its services. In the

work of the IRO, client participation was achieved, for the most part, through committees elected by the refugees.

Since the days of UNRRA, refugees had operated most of the camps through committees—most of them representing national groups. The headquarters office of the IRO encouraged the formation of the committees and gave them some financial support—for vehicles, printing, and office facilities. The Organization's representatives met regularly with the committees in area and headquarters offices. The committees then interpreted to the refugees new rules and regulations, resettlement policies, progress of United Nations action affecting their future status, and similar matters. In the various areas of operation, the channel through which the committees operated varied in accordance with the size of the caseload, the number of committees, and the local administrative structure. The committees represented the interest of their constituents in a wide variety of matters—housing, health and medical care, education of children, repatriation, and resettlement. The refugees gave their committees strong support and depended on them to intercede with the Organization in matters affecting both group and individual welfare.

In some ways the committees' activities made the concept of client participation a difficult one for many workers—and not only the social workers—to accept. The committees challenged policies and case decisions; they were sometimes vociferous and emotional. They were thus accused, at times, of exerting undue influence on the refugees with regard to repatriation and resettlement; of taking up too much staff time by defying and taking hours to discuss rules and regulations that were sometimes decisions that had been made by the military or on high diplomatic levels and that could not be cancelled or modified by the Organization; of being more interested in themselves as politicians than in the welfare of the refugees. Certainly, there were scattered instances in which those allegations were true.

On the other hand, the IRO, under the Constitution, had been instructed to "assist" refugees and displaced persons and to "protect" their rights and legitimate interests. The concept of the independence and free status of the refugee found to be within the mandate of the IRO is present in all parts of the Constitution. Many of the refugee leaders had brought their groups from the home village, had been with them in concentration and slave labor camps and in UNRRA camps; they had good ideas, intimate knowledge of their groups, and strong influence over them. As time went on and the committees and the staff got to know each other better, a precarious balance between the two was maintained in most areas.

It is difficult to know how well understood, or really accepted, the concept of client participation was. Perhaps the most general acceptance was achieved through employment of refugee staff in positions that carried a fairly high degree of supervisory and operational authority and that called for participation, on staff level, in policy making. Refugees in these positions included social workers, attorneys, physicians, teachers of both academic and vocational education, camp managers, pastors, historians, and other specialists who assisted in the eligibility interviewing. Many of these people were eminent in their own fields, both in their homelands and internationally. They proved themselves a gold mine of assistance to the staff members with limited knowledge of these national groups and their histories.

Most of these refugee workers maintained their professional discipline despite their own personal tragedies and the pressures put on them by desperate co-nationals to twist the facts to the advantage of the refugees. They carried, and still do carry, a heavy share of the IRO work and receive little acknowledgment by the outside world.

### *State-Federal Relations*

The Federal-State relationship in the United States in the operation of the public assistance programs is to some extent duplicated in the headquarters-field relationship in IRO operations.

The Constitution of the International Refugee Organization was mandatory on those countries that were signatories to the Constitution and on the occupied countries in which a legally binding, and militarily enforceable, agreement had been made. When the IRO took over from UNRRA, administrative set-ups varied from country to country, but there remained the necessity for assuring equal treatment of persons in similar circumstances, standards of care, protection of rights and interests, equal opportunity for resettlement and repatriation, a channel for appeal and fair hearing, channels for field supervision and technical consultation, and opportunities for zones and areas to use their own imagination and initiative in program development.

In this field there were two separate and distinct problems that caused great concern and that also pointed up the differences in concepts of Europeans and Americans.

One problem centered about those areas and zones that resented headquarters' supervision and direction. This resentment stemmed from what was primarily a nationality issue; each country and occupying authority was determined to do things its own way. The question of local autonomy or States' rights was also in the picture.

The second problem was how to assure that the conformities that were considered basic and essential be carried out. The United States concept was one of consultation, advice, group meetings, and technical field supervision of a type that would encourage the areas to conform, to understand the purpose of the procedures and regulations, and to use their own initiative and imagination. Many—not all—of the European workers pressed for a highly centralized, authoritarian approach. During 1948 and part of 1949, both methods prevailed simultaneously at times; since then the Social Security Administration concept has been followed. It was adhered to strictly by the Welfare Division.

The welfare staff in all areas and countries understood and appreciated this approach; headquarters and area staff worked together in developing

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**Table 6.—Old-age and survivors insurance: Monthly benefits<sup>1</sup> in current-payment status<sup>2</sup> at the end of the month, by type of benefit and by month, February 1950–February 1951, and monthly benefits awarded by type of benefit, February 1951**

[Amounts in thousands; data corrected to March 20, 1951]

Item	Total		Old-age		Wife's or husband's		Child's		Widow's or widower's		Mother's		Parent's	
	Number	Amount	Number	Amount	Number	Amount	Number	Amount	Number	Amount	Number	Amount	Number	Amount
Monthly benefits in current-payment status at end of month:														
1950														
February	2,824,829	\$58,074.3	1,332,875	\$34,815.0	404,014	\$5,587.0	649,758	\$8,586.0	270,384	\$5,640.9	154,177	\$3,257.6	13,621	\$187.9
March	2,861,536	58,956.6	1,351,985	35,380.8	409,330	5,671.9	655,558	8,673.6	276,050	5,764.9	154,884	3,275.7	13,729	189.7
April	2,888,715	59,638.4	1,365,504	35,807.4	413,456	5,741.3	659,584	8,736.3	280,890	5,871.7	155,432	3,290.2	13,849	191.5
May	2,911,562	60,195.6	1,375,882	36,128.7	416,365	5,791.5	663,610	8,799.1	285,753	5,978.4	155,957	3,304.3	13,905	193.6
June	2,930,357	60,681.5	1,384,823	36,415.8	419,123	5,840.0	665,351	8,828.7	290,307	6,079.8	156,664	3,322.2	14,089	194.9
July	2,946,096	61,124.8	1,394,920	36,734.7	422,448	5,896.3	663,858	8,810.3	293,915	6,159.8	156,792	3,327.6	14,163	196.1
August <sup>3</sup>	2,967,055	61,640.7	1,405,592	37,051.6	425,604	5,949.9	666,102	8,845.8	297,999	6,252.0	157,503	3,343.7	14,255	197.6
September	3,026,332	114,015.1	1,444,772	67,353.8	436,624	10,696.5	669,716	18,780.4	302,435	11,077.3	158,391	5,578.4	14,394	528.8
October	3,182,342	118,352.9	1,563,318	70,955.8	459,990	11,113.8	676,758	18,929.3	305,790	11,199.9	162,066	5,624.2	14,420	529.9
November	3,346,167	122,926.5	1,681,370	74,621.1	486,238	11,581.5	688,119	19,144.2	309,840	11,336.1	166,111	5,711.6	14,489	532.0
December	3,477,243	126,856.5	1,770,984	77,678.3	508,350	11,994.9	699,653	19,364.9	314,148	11,479.9	169,438	5,800.8	14,670	537.8
1951														
January	3,605,235	130,882.8	1,850,207	80,584.4	532,187	12,477.3	715,138	19,699.2	319,472	11,663.7	173,354	5,912.6	14,877	545.5
February	3,706,586	134,090.8	1,912,170	82,843.8	548,047	12,790.4	729,566	20,032.5	325,514	11,870.8	176,156	5,998.8	15,133	554.7
Monthly benefits awarded in February 1951	136,488	4,391.1	77,644	2,924.7	23,787	492.1	20,290	466.9	7,685	269.4	6,723	224.8	359	13.2

<sup>1</sup> Effective Sept. 1, 1950, under the Social Security Act Amendments of 1950: (1) husband's and widower's insurance benefits became payable; (2) the terms "primary insurance benefit" and "widow's current insurance benefit" were changed to "old-age insurance benefit" and "mother's insurance benefit," respectively.

<sup>2</sup> Benefit in current-payment status is subject to no deduction or only to deduction of fixed amount that is less than the current month's benefit.

<sup>3</sup> Partly estimated.

## PUBLIC ASSISTANCE CONCEPTS

(Continued from page 9)

policies and procedures, staff supervision, training institutes for staff, and relations with other divisions of the IRO and the voluntary societies. There were regular field trips and planned consultations; staff from the field came to headquarters to assist in the development and writing of new policies and procedures. It was not all clear sailing by any means. Some of the workers were under pressure from their governments to take a stand on this or that matter, regardless of the fact that welfare is a professional and not a political area. All, however, were interested in discussing and experimenting with headquarters-field relationships as developed in the United States and related them to their own homeland programs.

### Conclusions

What, then, is the meaning of the phrase "international social work,"

as was asked at the beginning? It is, in a sense, meaningless, if it implies a kind of social work inherently different from that practiced within a single country. It does imply, of course, cooperation among nations, and an attempt to understand situations beyond one's own national borders. The phrase cannot mean less than that.

International social work in the IRO went through shifts of meaning that were undoubtedly inherent in the complex structure of the Organization and the varying experiences of its personnel. Sometimes it seemed to mean social work in which much must be given up, social work at the level of the least experienced and least advanced nation—a kind of diluted and haphazard social work accompanied by a feeling of frustration rather than one of accomplishment. Some workers took it for granted that "international social work" could be no more than this.

By others the phrase was interpreted as a beckoning one, indicating

an interesting, exciting, and enlarged field in which to practice the profession of social work.

Finally the phrase came to have for many a meaning simple, basic, universal. The situations of stranded, bereft, helpless, displaced persons of every age and every walk of life, some sick and some well, some alone and some with families, some easily able to earn a living and some not—all were problems that resolved themselves into the common problems of people in need of services and assistance. Basic analysis of a person's, or family's, needs and basic attempts to resolve his problems in accordance with his own wishes and way of life, insofar as the agency was able, remained the same. Man's need for security, independence, a friendly neighborhood, acceptance by his fellow human beings, and pleasure in living is the same whatever the cause of the distress and wherever he may be. The same principles, it was found, apply to the techniques of successful assistance whatever its setting.