



## The Commission for Relief in Belgium C.R.B. (1914)

The Commission for Relief of Belgium (C.R.B.), the parent organization of the Belgian American Educational Foundation, was created in October 1914 by **Herbert Hoover**. A group of prominent Belgians and Americans residing in Belgium had approached the American Ambassador to Great Britain to find a leader to organize measures of relief in the face of agonizing food shortage in Belgium. Herbert Clark Hoover, age 40, an American mining engineer with offices in London accepted the challenge. Without taking any salary and paying for his own expenses, Hoover set up the import and purchase of crops from the USA within an operational framework that included five centers. Shipping, finance and diplomatic missions were organized from the C.R.B. executive headquarters in London.

In Brussels, the American Director of the C.R.B. supervised the relief through a volunteer group of American delegates. The agent of C.R.B. in Belgium, the Comité National de Secours et d'Alimentation with **Ernest Solvay** as Chairman and **Emile Francqui** as President organized food distribution in occupied Belgium through Provincial Committees.



*London, August 24, 1916.*

*Standing from left to right: H. Foster Bain, Roland F. Hill, Herbert Owen, G.I. Gay, W.J. Cozens, J.A. Nash, L. Belrose, Ben S. Allen, R.H. Jones, L.D. Mapes.*

*Seated from left to right: E. Sengier, Millard K. Shaler, Edgar Rickard, W. L. Honnold, **Herbert Hoover**, J. Beaver White, W. B. Poland, Hugh S. Gibson*

In Rotterdam, the cargo was unloaded, warehoused, repackaged and sent by rail and canal to Belgium. New York was the principal purchasing center and a recruiting center for Americans who wished to volunteer as C.R.B. representatives. Paris was the center for French financing negotiations and for tackling problems affecting Northern France.



Under the dynamic and capable leadership of Herbert Hoover, the C.R.B. had over 900 million U.S. dollars in receipts over the period of the War, financed by the governments of the United States, Great Britain, France and Belgium, as well as by massive voluntary donations from all over the civilized world. With these funds more than 5 million metric tons of provisions were secured and distributed in Belgium and Northern France. If one includes the internal advances of the C.R.B. in Belgium and Northern France, this makes a total outlay of 2.8 billion dollars worth of necessities of life.

The balances in the hands of the Commission for Relief in Belgium at the end of the war consisted of two categories. Unexpended balances of funds advanced by various governments and which were repaid to these governments. Balances from other sources were due to the voluntary character of the Commission: the free service of the direction, the distribution by volunteers, and the many charitable discounts granted by shipping, railway, insurance and commercial firms.

As a result prices of food in Belgium had been kept at 15 to 20% lower than in the neighboring countries. The balances from other than governmental sources were as follows:

First, a small profit was generated because of the policy of the Commission to require some partial payment from those who could afford to pay, but to donate the food to those who were unable to pay. Second, the Commission had balances of charitable funds which were not required after the Armistice of 1918. Third, because of the interference brought by the submarine war in the Atlantic and because some surplus of commodities was created, the largest part of the balance of the C.R.B. funds was accumulated, especially after the Armistice of 1918, from the liquidation outside Belgium of surplus food and equipment, and from sales of food to Belgians who could pay. Whereas the Commission earned profits of more than \$100,000,000 over five years of work, most of it was expended on the care of the destitute. The balance of benevolent funds remaining in the hands of the Commission in 1920 and destined for Belgium was about 240,000,000 BEF with a war-time book value of \$33,766,000. [read more](#)

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