

American Red Cross, and Mr. Henry James. The Commission sailed direct for England and their first interviews were with the American Ambassador in London and members of the British Government.

They then sailed for Holland, where they were received by members of the Dutch Government. Subsequently they obtained from all of the warring nations safe conduct and passports to the different countries. In Holland the War Relief Commission found that quite as serious as the problem of relief in Belgium was the necessity of aiding the refugees who had fled from Belgium into Holland in large numbers and had found it impossible to return to their own country. It was estimated that nearly a million - 800,000, as a matter of fact - Belgians were refugees in Holland, in addition to the numbers that were also refugees in England. At first these people had found sanctuary where they could, in private dwellings or in public buildings. In the municipalities of Holland, committees were formed to deal with their relief municipalities. Then the Government of Holland itself began a system of concentration camps where the refugees were grouped by hundreds and provided with food and clothing. With nothing to do, save to accept the charity offered, these camps, as might have been expected, soon became anything other than desirable communities in which to live. Idleness brought with it its inevitable weakening of character, and the War Commission saw that deterioration of physical and moral character was following this means of dealing with the problem. The Commission found that idleness threatened to be no less a misfortune to the refugees than homelessness. The missing links in the scheme for the relief of Belgians in Holland were lack of work for the people to do and lack of underclothing to keep them warm.

W.L. Mackenzie King Papers  
Volume D 7