Lord Boyd Orr occupies a unique place among the many men and women who have received the Peace Prize over the years. For while most others have been statesmen or politicians, or international lawyers, or persons associated with peace organizations, John Boyd Orr is not an international lawyer, nor a politician, nor a statesman, nor can it even be said that he has been an active participant in peace organizations for long periods in his life. His work has been devoted to the study of nutrition, the diet of animals and men.

But however great his scientific contributions may have been, they alone would not have earned him the Peace Prize, for scientific discoveries cannot, in themselves, create peace. It is only when they are employed to promote cooperation between nations that they become a valuable factor in the cause of peace. For John Boyd Orr the purpose of his scientific work is to find ways of making men healthier and happier so as to secure peace; he believes that healthy and happy men have no need to resort to arms in order to expand and acquire living space. «We must», to quote his own words, «conquer hunger and want, because hunger and want in the midst of plenty are a fatal flaw and a blot on our civilization. They are one of the fundamental causes of war. But it is no use trying to build the new world from the top down, with political ideas of spheres of influence and so on. We have to build it from the bottom upwards, and provide first the primary necessities of life for the people who have never had them, and build from the slums of this country upwards.»

Elsewhere he says: «Agreements between nations not to go to war have never lasted, and will never be enough to maintain the peace. The nations must construct peace through daily cooperation, with a positive goal in view, a goal which is seen to be mutually advantageous. Only this can remove the principal causes of war.» For Boyd Orr, Roosevelt's words «freedom from want» have become the very foundation of peace between nations.

John Boyd Orr is first of all a realist as all of his work testifies. Born in 1880, he is descended from a Scottish farming family and has strong roots in farming life and practical agriculture. But apart from being a farmer, he is a university professor and a scientist. He began his medical studies at the University of Glasgow, later qualifying as a doctor. His scientific turn of mind prompted him to take an early interest in research, and the first problem to claim his attention was that of the nutrition of domestic animals. In 1914 he was appointed director of the Institute of Animal Nutrition in Aberdeen.

His work, however, was interrupted by the First World War in which he served as a doctor. After the war, in 1919, he became director of the Rowett Research Institute in Aberdeen, a position he held until 1945 when he became professor of agriculture at Aberdeen University. That same year he became director general of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, better known as the FAO, a post he relinquished last year.

During his term of office at the Rowett Institute, Boyd Orr laid the foundations for the agricultural and nutritional policies which he was later to pursue in the FAO. He published an impressive number of papers while he was director of the Rowett Institute, confining his work until 1928 to studies on the nutrition of
domestic animals. His first work devoted to human nutrition, *Milk Consumption and the Growth of School Children*, which appeared in 1928, was based on dietary experiments carried out among schoolchildren in the mining districts. This publication marked the beginning of a whole series of papers dealing with the subject of the human diet: *Diet and Illness, Diet, Health and Agriculture*, and many others. In 1936 he published *Food, Health and Income*, a work which more than any other helped to stimulate discussion of nutritional problems and to lay the foundation for a positive nutritional policy.

The originality of this investigation lay neither in its method nor in its general findings concerning the consumption of food in relation to different income groups. Earlier research carried out in this field in several countries had revealed that a greater proportion of the income in lower income groups was spent on food and that the nature of the diet varied from one income group to another. But this had become dead knowledge and was not used when it came to formulating nutritional policy.

What was original in Boyd Orr's research was the fact that, by analyzing the composition of the diet, he was able to indicate its nutritive value for each income group. Furthermore, he calculated the nutritional level of the various income groups for the whole British population. His results were so surprising they created a sensation. They showed that even in Great Britain, where the standard of living was higher than in most countries, the diet of a very large part of the population was inferior to that accepted by nutritional physiologists as adequate. Boyd Orr showed that a substantial increase in agricultural production was essential if the population was to receive reasonable nourishment. An increase in agricultural production would be of considerable benefit for, by providing improved nourishment for the population, it would enable the population in its turn to raise productivity in general. What had to be done, therefore, was to formulate and put into practice a policy which would satisfy these two requisites.

It is no coincidence that Boyd Orr thereafter devoted himself to the coordination of agricultural and nutritional policies, not only in order to free mankind from want, but also to create a basis for peaceful cooperation between classes, nations, and races. Originally, it was no doubt his deep compassion for those living in poverty - as a doctor he had seen many of them in the slums of Glasgow - that induced him to study the problems of human nutrition. He had been acquainted with agriculture since childhood and as early as the 1920's he was keenly aware of the importance of having an efficient, rational husbandry together with a food policy which would bring agricultural produce within reach of everyone's pocket. He has always been opposed to any agricultural policy based on restricted production.

Continuing to develop his ideas, he gave them concrete expression in a proposal he put forward when he became secretary of the Scottish Committee of 1932, established by the National Council for the Development of Scotland. These were the ideas which later prevailed when it came to the framing of a food policy for Great Britain.

Boyd Orr's ideas have left their mark on British agricultural and food policies. Had his work stopped there, it would have been of little or no importance to international cooperation. But his ideas soon spread beyond the boundaries of Great Britain, for agricultural and nutritional problems exist in every country, today as always in the past.

Yet the propagation of an idea does not necessarily mean that it will determine the solution of problems. The problems of nutrition were left untackled until the harsh reality of the period following the First World War impelled responsible men to seek an answer. For the world was facing a situation in which famine
was decimating entire populations while agricultural crises were arising from overabundance of agricultural produce which those who needed it were unable to purchase. And at the same time the people in some of the agricultural countries could not afford to buy the products of their industrial counterparts because the farmers were too poor.

This was one of the problems highlighted at the World Economic Conference held at Geneva in 1927, but no further progress was made at that time. It was not until 1934, upon the initiative of Australian High Commissioner Stanley Bruce, that the League of Nations Assembly took up the question, appointing an international committee of nutritional physiologists to establish the food requirements of the world. Boyd Orr was a member of this committee, which presented its report in 1936. Later in the same year a committee composed of nutritional physiologists, agricultural experts, and economists was asked to investigate the relationships among diet, health, agriculture, and economics. Although Boyd Orr was not a member of this latter committee, he exerted considerable influence on its work. The report was submitted in 1937. However, the Second World War broke out soon afterwards, bringing these efforts of the League of Nations to an end.

War gives little opportunity for international cooperation, but it often happens in an individual country that things which would seem impossible in peacetime manage to get done in time of war. And so it was on this occasion. By means of rationing and other appropriate economic measures, the British people were given as adequate a diet as can be provided in a time of scarcity. This application of Boyd Orr's ideas resulted in a far higher level of health among the population than anyone had expected.

This was a step forward. But more important still was the fact that, even in time of war, there were men whose eyes were turned toward the future, men who could plan for the postwar era when the devastation of war could be repaired and the world led forward once again along the path of peace. Boyd Orr was such a man. In 1942 he visited the United States as a private individual to canvass support for his ideas. There can be no doubt that the Hot Springs Conference held in the spring of 1943 was strongly influenced by his views. The conference endorsed the necessity of coordinating food and agricultural policies, and proposed the creation of an international organization to study these questions. The problems that would need an immediate solution after the end of the war were defined, as was the policy which would have to be pursued if the whole world were eventually to be freed from want. The resolutions of the conference were wholly in accordance with the line taken by Boyd Orr.

The organization proposed at Hot Springs, the FAO, was launched at a conference in Quebec in the autumn of 1945. Boyd Orr, who took part in this conference, was appointed director-general of the organization. It was this post which gave him the opportunity to make his most valuable contribution in the international field.

Boyd Orr regarded the establishment of this organization as one of the most important steps that had ever been taken to construct a better world and to lay the foundation of a lasting peace. In his own words: «All nations must accept the responsibility of assuring their own people the food which is necessary to maintain life and health. Governments must cooperate to ensure that this goal is attained by people in all countries. This is the first step on the road to fulfilling the Atlantic Charter's promise of freedom from want.»

One of the most important tasks of the FAO after the war was to ensure an equitable distribution among the nations of the world of the food products which were in short supply. The International Emergency
Food Council set up for this purpose was a kind of international rationing directorate whose operations continued until the summer of 1949. This rationing arrangement was undoubtedly responsible for preventing the famine which threatened many countries in the postwar period.

But such work does not constitute the main responsibility of the FAO. Its most important function is to assist agricultural development and the production of nutritional raw materials in all countries of the world. Under Boyd Orr’s direction the FAO has become the most efficient organization in this field. It has taken up a series of technical and economic problems which must be solved before any real progress in the development of agriculture can be made. In numerous ways it has assisted the introduction of new farming methods. This is in itself a vast undertaking, for not only is it necessary to teach farmers modern methods, it is also necessary to make their adoption economically feasible. All this can be difficult enough in countries where agriculture has reached a comparatively advanced stage of development. But anyone who is at all familiar with the methods practiced in the more primitive countries, to the detriment of both the farmers themselves and of the world, will readily appreciate the enormity of the task. And it is precisely in those countries that action is most needed.

But Boyd Orr did not stop at that. For it was not enough merely to increase agricultural production; it was essential also to arrest sharp fluctuations in prices and to prevent the accumulation of surpluses which remained unsold. He had himself lived through the 1930’s. «Governments must», he says, «ensure the existence of a market with reasonable prices, not just for the sake of the farmers but because it is to the benefit of commerce, industry, and the whole people». Accordingly, he proposed the creation of a World Food Board which would assume wide responsibilities. It was to stabilize food prices on the world markets, to create reserves of food to meet shortages and to counteract increases in price in the event that harvests should fail, to raise capital to finance the sale of surpluses to countries with the greatest need, and finally to cooperate with organizations such as the World Bank, which could provide credit for the development of agriculture, industry, and the economy as a whole, with a view to more rapid progress toward the appointed goal.

The World Food Board, which was to be invested with strong executive power, never became reality. It was too big a step to be taken all at once. In its stead the World Food Council, an advisory body with no executive authority, was established within the framework of FAO.

In the summer of 1948 Boyd Orr resigned his position as director-general of the FAO, but this is not to say that he has retired from active life. He has continued to work for his ideas which have gradually become more and more comprehensive in scope. In his early years he began the study of agricultural problems, approaching the subject from the point of view of a farmer and of a nutritional physiologist. Even as a young man he investigated the relationships among men’s diet, their health, and their life. He saw the connection between agriculture, which provides the means, and human beings, who should use these means to improve their health and standard of living. He fought for his ideas first in his own country, Scotland, and in England. But he reached out beyond national boundaries and embarked on international work under the auspices of the League of Nations. And so, after the last war, the opportunity came his way of devoting some years to laying the foundation of the organization which should turn his ideas into reality.

Boyd Orr never loses sight of the principal objective. He emphasizes more and more strongly how important international cooperation in economic matters is for peace and he attaches more and more weight to promoting rapid economic progress in the underdeveloped countries. He says: «This will
increase productivity and purchasing power and create wider markets for both agriculture and industry. Such a development is not only necessary to the welfare of countless human beings, but also to the continued existence of our scientific and technological civilization, and to the establishment of a lasting peace.»

He points out that science, which has placed in our hands the means of achieving every possible technical advance, has brought people closer together in a way which today renders geographical distances meaningless. But at the same time there continue to exist national economic systems still isolated from each other as if nothing has happened; indeed, our twentieth century sees them more isolated than in the past. If I have understood Boyd Orr correctly, it is what we might call the tension resulting from the disparity between the standards of living in different countries that is now the great danger, a danger which could trigger a new war.

And what is the position today? The greater part of the population of the world lives in countries which are economically underdeveloped. The population of these countries is increasing more rapidly than ever before because medical science is now able to counteract the vast epidemics of former ages. But a primitive economy cannot support a growing population which in many places now lives on the brink of famine. In contrast to these countries we have those with a sound economy and a low birthrate. In these countries the standard of living of the population as a whole has improved and continues to rise steadily.

This disparity creates tension between countries which is felt all the more these days now that progress in communication has brought nations closer together. Conditions in the wealthier countries have also become better known to the rest of the world since many citizens of underdeveloped countries have been pursuing their education in Europe or in the United States. Having once seen how people can live, these citizens naturally determine that their own countries should reach a similar standard in a very short time. Unless we devote all our resources to help the economy of these backward countries, the tension may one day build up to the point of explosion.

Boyd Orr has realized this perhaps more clearly than most men, and it has been his life’s work to find ways to reduce this tension. Being the realist that he is, he has laid plans on the material and practical level: «Let nations get together and discuss concrete, practical questions which they understand are for the benefit of mankind; then they can talk and reach agreement. If they start by discussing frontiers and spheres of influence, they will never succeed.»

This thought is similar to that which Jane Addams, also a winner of the Peace Prize, expresses in her book Peace and Bread, when she says: «A genuine Society of Nations may finally be evolved by millions of earth’s humblest toilers, whose lives are consumed in securing the daily needs of existence for themselves and their families.»

Boyd Orr has never forgotten how the average man thinks and feels. He knows the farmer too well for that. He knows that the man in the street hates war and all it stands for. He hates it too, and as the years have passed, the idea of peace has gained an increasingly greater hold over him. In 1945 he was elected president of the National Peace Council, which represents more than fifty British peace organizations, and this year he has accepted the post of president of the new World Union of Peace Organizations. He is also president of the World Movement for World Federal Government.
His membership in these peace organizations is fully consistent with all his other activity. He has always been opposed to those who attach too much significance to national frontiers, those who place their sovereign rights above all else. He never resorts to grand words when talking of peace. What he says is plain and simple.

But his accomplishment is immense. Few can claim to have planned and carried through a work as important to the human race as his, a work which clearly paves the way for peace.

For this great work in the service of mankind which, once begun, can never be halted, he richly merits the Nobel Peace Prize.


2. From Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s «Four Freedoms» speech, Jan. 6, 1941.
