

Famine Conditions in Russia

By William Z. Foster
(Staff Correspondent The Federated Press).

Moscow, Aug. 3.—Judging by the reports now reaching Moscow from the stricken districts, Russia is faced with a terrible famine situation. Over an enormous territory, about as large as France and Germany, and which is ordinarily one of the great grain growing sections, the crops have failed almost completely. The long, rainless period has literally burned them up. What little escaped the unprecedented drought has been devoured by the countless myriads of locusts that have descended upon the country. The district affected lies principally in the valley of the Volga river and stretches virtually from the Caucasus mountains to the Urals.

Many millions of people are actually at the point of starvation. Great armies of them are wandering away from their homes, seeking escape from the famine districts to more favored localities. This starvation coming so soon after the harvest time indicates on the one hand the completeness of the crop failure and on the other the smallness of the food available. Because of the ravages of Kolchak's bandits two years ago and the severe crop failure last year the peasants had been living from hand to mouth and depending altogether upon this year's crop for quick relief. Hence when it failed them they were thrown immediately into the grip of famine.

Americans Inquire About Famine.

Yesterday a number of Americans, most of them journalists, who are anxious to help arouse public opinion to Russia's great need, paid a visit to Lunacharsky of the general relief committee. We found him in his office, a tiny room in a Kremlin palace. As he told us many harrowing details of the famine in various provinces he seemed plainly worried over the situation. He said that in many places the people are actually starving. Thousands of parents are abandoning their children to the government's care in the belief that it will find food for them somehow; while they themselves wander off to they know not what fate, eating roots and bark from trees anywhere they can find them. He said that the number of children in government institutions, children's colonies, etc., in the stricken districts had trebled in a month. From other sources we heard that many mothers are drowning their babies, preferring that to seeing them die of hunger. In innumerable cases the peasants have fed the thatched roofs of their houses and barns to the starving livestock. How they will face the bitter Russian winter without roofs over their heads they cannot tell. All they know is that their horses and cattle are famished and that there is some nourishment in straw.

Lunacharsky pointed out that one of the very gravest dangers in the situation is found in the fact that the peasants, faced by starvation, are eating up their seed corn. Should this continue and they do not get their winter

wheat sown before October 1 it would be a terrible calamity. Inevitably the country would be faced with famine next year again, no matter how generous the relief later on this year. Hence, to save the peasants from the great disaster of consuming their seed corn is the first task of the government. It is drumming up food supplies on all sides and rushing them to the famine belt. The slogan, "Everything for the Volga peasants," is ringing through the land. In response to my request for a statement on the situation, Lunacharsky sent me the following letter:

Famine Figures.

"Moscow, August 3, 1921.

"Wm. Z. Foster: It is impossible to give detailed statistics of the adult population of the famine district, but we can give the figures which the relief commission against hunger on the Volga obtained. The total number of the population starving and seeking aid is 18,000,000. We must give a minimum of nine poods (a pood is about 36 pounds) of bread to each person. We must understand that the livestock in the district must also have food, and that the psychology of the peasants is such that they will divide their food with their livestock in order to save them.

"It is understood that besides bread the famine stricken must also have other products. We must, to begin with, bring a minimum of 41,000,000 poods of bread to the peasant population, and 18,000,000 to the town population. Up to the first of September we must get to that district 15,000,000 poods of seed. I would have you note that the 15,000,000 poods is needed at once and the 44,000,000 within two or three months' time. But when we have done this we have not conquered the famine; we have only removed its keen edge.

"The government does not believe that it can give the minimum amount of 59,000,000 poods unaided. Besides it will surely be necessary to supplement this amount with another 50 per cent. We hope that the help of the whole civilized world will furnish us not only the minimum of 59,000,000, but as much as 100,000,000 poods.

"Naturally it is understood that clothes and shoes for the children are also necessary. We hope that a separate fund for children may be organized. I am giving you special statistics on the children of the famine districts.

(Signed) "People's Commission for Education,

"A Lunacharsky."

Children Suffer Hunger.

Condensed and stripped of many interesting features showing the number of children in colonies, gardens, schools, etc., as well as the number of such institutions in each district, Lunacharsky's statistics tabulate the famine children as follows:

District	Ages of Children		Totals
	1 to 7	8 to 16	
Tartar Soviet Rep.	659,486	604,734	1,264,220
Chuvash Ind. Terr.	126,019	125,059	251,078
Marishka Ind. Terr.	31,990	30,138	62,128
Samara	607,553	563,490	1,171,043
Saratov	798,368	709,037	1,507,405
Simbirsk	380,925	363,449	744,374
Ufa	321,314	276,197	597,511
Viatka	250,597	230,684	481,281
Astrakhan	60,135	75,417	135,552
Tzaritsin	129,139	132,265	261,404
Volga Commune	110,874	115,996	226,870
	3,476,400	3,226,466	6,702,866

These statistics indicate the enormous armies of children now exposed to starvation. They are compiled from the school records of the stricken districts—most of which possess a well-developed school system. It is proposed to use these systems as the food relief organizations if the 40,000 teachers can be held together in the face of the terrible panic that has seized hold of the country.

In meeting the great problem she is now confronted with Russia, already

half famished, will do her utmost. But she must have assistance. To avert an awful calamity in the Volga provinces, world co-operation is necessary. It is vitally essential that the United States do its share. To this end every American organization of a radical, liberal or humanitarian tendency should be set in motion at once. Well fed America must contribute generously to the aid of starving Russia.