

## 19 *Relief Is Politics*

Stopped by organized labor on the economic and political areas, there remained one area which Communism could call its own, that of enlisting sympathy and financial aid for Soviet Russia. This two-fold activity paid off handsomely, the former in opening many a door, the latter in hard cash.

The young Soviet regime, struggling desperately against the Whites from within and economic blockade from without, aroused the sympathy of many liberals here and elsewhere. And the indiscriminate anti-Soviet campaign in the daily press, featuring such stories as the nationalization of all Russian women under the age of 35, had the effect of making thoughtful men skeptical of any unfavorable news from Soviet Russia, even when it happened to be the truth.<sup>+89</sup>

Pro-Soviet interpretations, such as the book of the Englishman Arthur Williams, an eye-witness of the Bolshevik Revolution, the report of William C. Bullitt on his mission to Russia in 1920, and that of Dr. Alfonse Goldschmidt on the Soviet structure and economic plans, became semi-Bibles for liberal admirers of Lenin and Trotsky.

Russia was ravaged by war and civil war. That was no secret. And those seeking a medium to express their sympathy for the beleaguered Soviet regime turned to the Friends of Soviet Russia, organized during the underground days of the CP. The FSR was a happy idea, and it spread rapidly. Branches were opened in many

cities. A loosely knit body, people of various political shadings could participate in it on the local level. A number of middle-class people were drawn in.

*Soviet Russia Today*, taken over by the FSR, skilfully presented the highly ambitious Soviet plans for economic reconstruction, education, sciences and arts, making them appear feasible.

The famine on the Volga, 1921, was the great chance for the FSR. The threat of a Soviet collapse stirred Communists and Soviet sympathizers here to action. The FSR attempted—and not entirely without success—to gain a monopoly on the fund-raising for the starving Russians.

### ZINOVIEV SPEAKS FROM BOTH CORNERS OF HIS MOUTH . . .

From the very start of the famine, Moscow cunningly mixed propaganda with relief. With an air of martyrdom, the inability to cope with the famine was attributed wholly to the counterrevolution and the foreign blockade, and not in the least to the Soviet internal policy.

This was the tenor of the appeal to the workers of the world, signed by G. Zinoviev, dated July 30, 1921. It was the first official confirmation of the gravity of the hunger on the Volga. (Under Stalin, the famine in the Ukraine, in the winter of 1931–1932, was carefully hidden from the outside world.)

Zinoviev claimed that Soviet Russia had “fought and suffered for the entire international proletariat. Her bleeding wounds she received in fighting the world’s capitalism.”

He complained that the “English and American governments . . . were waiting for the collapse of the Soviet regime before sending a crust of bread.”

Zinoviev did not forget to appeal to the “honest bourgeois parties whose conscience and humanity asserted themselves,” assuring them that the help would go “to all elements in distress. . . .”<sup>\*145</sup>

The State Department had not encouraged relief work in Soviet Russia. One reason was that Americans were imprisoned there without cause. Another, that the Communists placed difficulties in the way of bona fide relief bodies. This was brought out in the exchange of letters between Dr. Judah L. Magnes, representing the Committee for Medical Aid to Soviet Russia, and Norman H.

Davies, Acting Secretary of State, Herbert Hoover and the Red Cross officials.\*<sup>146</sup>

However, when the magnitude of the hunger on the Volga became known, in the fall of 1921, Congress authorized the establishment of the American Relief Administration (ARA), with an appropriation of \$20 million. Lenin was more than glad to accept the proffered help, and the ARA, headed by Herbert Hoover, did magnificent work. It introduced, in October of the same year, ten-dollar food drafts for individuals in Russia. These drafts saved thousands of lives. Many writers, scientists and composers existed on the ARA packages.

Lenin or no Lenin, the American Communists could not keep silent and let a noted conservative save the Soviet regime from collapse. Their publications campaigned angrily against the ARA, trying to frighten the Soviet well-wishers with melodramatic tales of counterrevolutionary plots hatched inside Russia by Hoover's agents.\*<sup>147</sup> In consequence, the FSR came in for a sizable sum of money.

#### CONTRASTING POLAND WITH SOVIET RUSSIA

Soviet prestige as a defender of Jews during the civil war was heightened by the flood of disturbing news from the newly created republics in Eastern Europe. The insertion in the Versailles Peace Treaty, 1919, of guaranteed minority rights in these new republics, for which an American Jewish delegation, headed by Louis Marshall and Stephen S. Wise—in conjunction with a Jewish world delegation—had labored so hopefully, proved futile as a safeguard for the unhampered development of the Jewish group.<sup>+40</sup>

Most guilty was Poland. The joyful news of independence was celebrated in Poland by pogroms in several cities, notably Lemberg (Lvov). A meeting to protest the Polish pogroms was held in Manhattan Opera House, August 26, 1919. Dr. Judah L. Magnes, Louis Marshall, B. Zuckerman and Max Pine spoke.

Compared with the harsh discriminatory measures in Poland, the equality enjoyed by Jews in Soviet Russia seemed significant. Those who were aware that the pauperization of the Jews was, to a great extent, the direct result of Soviet policies placed their hopes on the much-publicized and far-reaching Soviet projects to rehabilitate the

declassed Jews, making them productive citizens. These projects carried a strong emotional appeal.

Most pronounced was the shift in mood among the two groups supposedly poles apart from each other: the labor circles around the *Forward* and the wealthy of the Joint Distribution Committee.

The first lines sympathetic to the Soviet government appeared in the *Forward* July 19, 1918. It spoke against blockading Russia and asked for economic aid. Editor Ab. Cahan, not given to half measures, soon had the *Forward* closed on Soviet criticism, though this did not last long. He even refused to print an article written by his friend, the noted Menshevik, Raphael Abramovitch, in answer to Olgin's glowing reports on his trip to Russia in 1920.\*<sup>148</sup>

Only the second Socialist split in 1921 and the consequent appearance of a rival paper caused Cahan to open the columns of the *Forward* to opponents of Soviet Russia. Still, the paper loyally continued to support the various financial drives for Russia and the Jews there, receiving official thanks of members of Lenin's cabinet.\*<sup>149</sup> However, in 1923, the *Forward* and its editor took an uncompromising and unflinching stand against Communism in Russia and elsewhere. The developing Communist-Left action in the unions and the Workmen's Circle doubtlessly quickened this evolution.

The unions completed the same cycle, from pro- to anti-Soviet, in about the same time. Schlesinger's project to raise funds to send sewing machines for the Russian clothing factories was dropped, though the ILGWU did send immediate aid to the hungry in 1921.

As for the JDC, it went into Russia for aid and rehabilitation work on a wide scale.