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## **Herbert Hoover & the American Relief Administration's Efforts in Soviet Russia, 1921-1923; Anti-Soviet Sentiment Stymies Success**

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HERBERT HOOVER & THE AMERICAN RELIEF ADMINISTRATION'S EFFORTS IN SOVIET RUSSIA,  
1921-1923; ANTI-SOVIET SENTIMENT STYMIES SUCCESS

by

Megan Ryan

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for graduation with Honors in the History

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Landon Storrs  
Thesis Mentor

Spring 2018

All requirements for graduation with Honors in the  
History have been completed.

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Alyssa Park  
History Honors Advisor

**Herbert Hoover & the American  
Relief Administration's Efforts in  
Soviet Russia, 1921-1923;  
Anti-Soviet Sentiment Stymies Success**

**Megan Ryan  
The University of Iowa  
Advised by Dr. Landon Storrs**

## **Table of Contents**

I. Abstract.....	iii
II. Key Figures.....	iv
III. Introduction.....	1
IV. Survey of Famine Relief & Russian-US Relations Pre-1921.....	3
V. Historiography of the 1921 Famine & the ARA.....	5
VI. Anti-Soviet Sentiment at the Start.....	7
VII. Difficulties in Distribution.....	16
VIII. Evaluation of ARA Effectiveness.....	24
IX. Conclusion.....	30
X. Appendix.....	32
XI. Bibliography.....	36

*Herbert Hoover & the American Relief Administration's Efforts in Soviet Russia: 1921-1923;  
Anti-Soviet Sentiment Stymies Success*  
**Megan Ryan**

**Abstract**

This project examines political enmity's role within Herbert Hoover and the American Relief Administration's efforts to quell an extensive famine in Soviet Russia from 1921 to 1923. ARA members claimed that relief efforts were solely humanitarian, not an attempt to sway the USSR from socialism. Portraying the relief program as a humanitarian effort left open the possibility of a friendship between two countries with diametrically opposing ideologies. This paper argues that it was, in fact, anti-Soviet sentiment in the Hoover administration that directed the conception and actions of the ARA mission in famine-stricken Russia. It also shows how the ARA's anti-Soviet sentiment reinforced Soviet officials' own anti-American views, and ultimately hindered the deployment and efficacy of the mission. The paper makes use of ARA personnel's oral histories and memoirs, materials not yet widely utilized due to the general disinterest of American historians towards the topic. Through these materials, it will demonstrate that the atmosphere of mutual distrust, predating the Cold War, hinted at the beginnings of a longstanding ideological rivalry between the US and USSR.

**Keywords:** *American Relief Administration, US-USSR Relations, Famine Relief, Ideology*

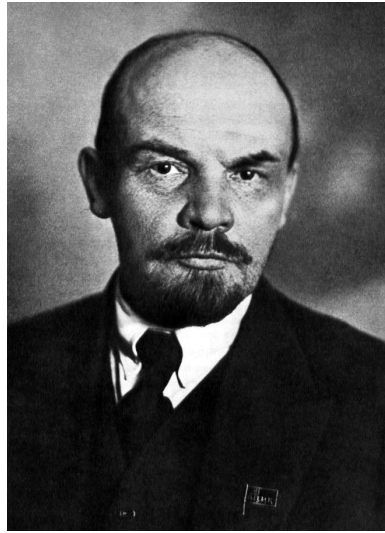
## Key Figures



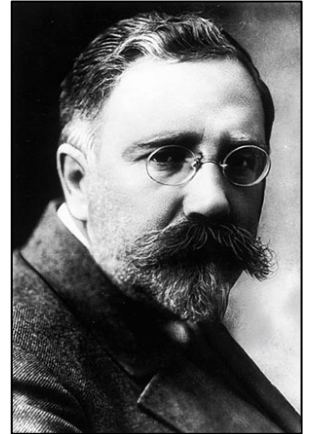
**Colonel William Haskell**  
Chief of the Russian  
Operations of the ARA



**Herbert Hoover**  
US Secretary of Commerce  
Director of the ARA



**Vladimir Lenin**  
Chairman of the Council of People's  
Commissars of the USSR



**Lev Kamenev**  
Deputy Chairman of the  
Council of People's  
Commissars of the USSR



**Elmer Burland**  
Chief of the Food Package  
Operation in Russia



**Cyril Quinn**  
ARA Member



**Will Shafroth**  
ARA Member



**Lincoln Hutchinson**  
Special Investigator of the  
Russian Unit of the ARA



**Frank Golder**  
Special Investigator of the  
Russian Unit of the ARA



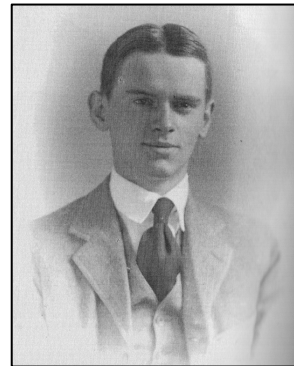
**Marshall Tuthill**  
ARA Member



**Kosta Boris**  
US Food Administration  
Member



**Nadia de Kanel Slack**  
Interpreter for the ARA



**Harold Fleming**  
ARA Member



**Harold Fisher**  
ARA Historian

# Herbert Hoover & the American Relief Administration's Efforts in Soviet Russia, 1921-1923; Anti-Soviet Sentiment Stymies Success

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## Introduction

### An Overview of the 1921 Famine & the American Relief Administration's Efforts

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The year was 1922, the holocaust that swept in the wake of World War I, first the Revolution and then the Civil War, brought destruction and desolation throughout its land. Less than half of the land was under cultivation, food was almost unattainable. Millions of men, women and children were starving and dying. On the streets of Kazan, where I lived at that time, it was a daily harrowing unforgettable sight. During that period the American Relief Administration, organized by Mr. Herbert C. Hoover, came to Russia establishing branches of the ARA in a number of towns and cities with Headquarters in Moscow. The thought of food and medical supplies was a bright ray of hope to countless of Russians. Kitchens were set up where children received one meal a day consisting of soup, rice and cocoa. Children looked very old, emaciated to skin and bone, with huge protruding abdomens. One thought occupied the men – what merciful way could be found to ease their suffering. This helped to sustain life in those whom it was still possible to save. For countless of others it was too late.<sup>1</sup>

- Nadia de Kanel Slack (1968)

Interpreter for the American Relief Administration, 1922-1923

---

Nadia de Kanel Slack's portrait of Russia from 1914 to 1922 is that of misfortune after misfortune. Throughout its history, Russia had endured war, revolution, famine, and plague, but never before had the nation been forced to endure them sequentially, which is made evident by Slack's horrific account of her home country.<sup>2</sup> By the end of World War I, Russia, like most of the other participating nations, had suffered devastating casualties. However, unlike those other participants, Russia simultaneously underwent an upheaval of class hierarchy as it replaced monarchism with socialism during the Russian Revolution. Once in power, the Bolsheviks had to defend themselves against anti-Bolshevik Russian forces financially and militarily supported by

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<sup>1</sup> "Oral History Interview with Nadia de Kanel Slack" conducted by Raymond Henle in Saranac Lake, New York, 1968-02-14. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Alfred Golder and Lincoln Hutchinson, *On the Trail of the Russian Famine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1927), vii.

the United States, resulting in the Russian Civil War. This period of tumultuous change resulted in a severe famine and an outbreak of infectious diseases that the new government was simply unable to control.<sup>3</sup>

After an appeal from Soviet author Maxim Gorky to US Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, who had already earned his nickname as the ‘Great Humanitarian’ due to his relief efforts in Belgium from 1914 to 1919, negotiations began over famine relief. These crucial negotiations concluded on August 20, 1921, and Hoover’s American Relief Administration (ARA), a quasi-governmental relief organization created in 1919 through government appropriations and private donations, set off to establish missions throughout the vast expanse of Russia.<sup>4</sup> Two years later, the ARA had managed to set up thousands of kitchens, administer about eight million inoculations, transport about 540,000 tons of food, and ultimately sustain over ten million people.<sup>5</sup>

ARA members claimed that their relief efforts were solely humanitarian, not an attempt to sway the USSR from socialism. Portraying the relief program as a humanitarian effort left open the possibility of friendship between the two countries with diametrically opposing ideologies. The Deputy Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars, Lev Kamenev, even promised Hoover in 1923 that, “[The U.S.S.R.] never will forget the aid rendered to them by the American people, through the agency of the American Relief Administration, holding it to be a pledge of the future of friendship of the two nations.”<sup>6</sup> And yet, for decades, this period remained

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<sup>3</sup> Frank Alfred Golder and Lincoln Hutchinson, *On the Trail of the Russian Famine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1927), vii.

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin M. Weissman, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia: 1921-1923* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974), xi.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 198-199.

<sup>6</sup> Lev Kamenev as quoted by Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: Volume 2: The Cabinet and the Presidency 1920-1933* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), 26.



fairly unstudied by Americans and scorned by Russians.<sup>7</sup> This is because it was, in fact, anti-Soviet sentiment in the Hoover administration that directed the conception and actions of the ARA's mission in famine-stricken Russia. The ARA's anti-Soviet prejudices reinforced Soviet officials' own anti-American views and ultimately hindered the deployment and efficacy of the mission. Examining the ARA personnel's oral histories and memoirs, materials not yet widely utilized due to the general disinterest of American historians towards the topic, bolsters this argument precisely because they trace the development of this anti-Soviet sentiment among those actually administering the food aid. The atmosphere of mutual distrust, predating the Cold War, hinted at the beginnings of a longstanding ideological rivalry between the US and USSR.

## **Survey of Famine Relief & Russian-U.S. Relations Pre-1921**

### **A Contextual Framework of How the Famine Relief Efforts Came to Be**

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The American expedition took place as the embers of the 1917 Russian Revolution still smoldered. The nearly 300 American relief workers, most of them veterans of the Great War, were the first group of outsiders to break through Russia's isolationism and record the impact of the Revolution. They were the first as well to have sustained exposure to the strange new phenomenon of Russian Bolshevism, known to the American public from terrifying and sensationalistic newspaper stories.<sup>8</sup>

- Bertrand M. Patenaude (2002)  
Historian

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Prior to World War I, famine relief projects in the United States were primarily small-scale and had experienced many distributional difficulties due to bad crops, floods, and inadequate transportation while addressing crises. However, as a result of the extensive devastation that the Great War brought to the European continent, the US undertook massive

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<sup>7</sup> Benjamin M. Weissman, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia: 1921-1923* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974), 198-199, xi.

<sup>8</sup> Bertrand M Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 1.

humanitarian endeavors on a global scale never seen before.<sup>9</sup> The American Relief Administration, created for this sole purpose, proceeded to conduct relief projects in twenty-three countries. Hoover later recalled the enormity of this unprecedented responsibility; “[T]here was no former human experience to turn for guidance. It was not ‘relief’ in any known sense.”<sup>10</sup> Some missions were inherently more complex undertakings than others, and nowhere was that more evident than in the still smoldering embers of post-revolutionary Russia.

From their first interactions to the late nineteenth century, Russian-American relations were based on mutual trust and conducted with the balance of global powers in mind. Relations were often even warm, despite minor disputes over resources in the Pacific. In the United States, during this era, Russia was commonly perceived as a cordial power.<sup>11</sup> The year 1917, however, as Bertrand Patenaude elucidates, marked a divisive development – the Bolshevik Revolution. Relations rapidly became hostile in response to the now starkly dissonant ideologies at play. Americans’ previously positive image of Russia was tainted.<sup>12</sup> From 1917 to 1921, tensions between the two nations had planted such deep roots that it is difficult to overstate the degree of resulting animosity that resulted. The American and Russian representatives themselves embodied this rancor at negotiations, where they respectively advocated Republican liberalism and global socialist revolution.<sup>13</sup>

Due to this widespread ideological enmity, Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR, Vladimir Lenin, who came to power in the Bolshevik coup, actually refused the Americans’ first offers of food aid in 1919 and 1920. However, since they still lacked

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<sup>9</sup> Herbert Hoover Presidential Library Association, *Herbert Hoover: The Great War and its Aftermath 1914-1923*, Edited by Lawrence E. Gelfand (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1979), 43.

<sup>10</sup> Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: Volume 1: Years of Adventure 1874-1920* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), 154.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Ziegler, “Russian-American Relations: From Tsarism to Putin,” *International Politics* 51, no. 6 (2014): 671-673.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 687.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 671.

a firm control of their country, Soviet authorities proved unable to alleviate the famine themselves.<sup>14</sup> Seeing how drastic the situation was quickly becoming, Maxim Gorky petitioned Lenin himself for permission to write as a supplicant to Herbert Hoover. This suggestion from a close friend, along with an increase in the severity of the already existing famine, finally convinced Lenin to begrudgingly accept the Americans' help in 1921.<sup>15</sup> As a result of political enmity's role in the ARA's efforts, this episode of international relations has been constantly reinterpreted as political ideologies have changed over time.

## **Historiography of the 1921 Famine & the ARA**

### **A Survey of How Historians' Attitudes Have Shifted on the Subject**

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Although the rescue mission excited considerable interest and sympathy in the United States at the time, it has been all but forgotten by American historiography and is almost unknown even to the educated people today. Paradoxically, the memory of American philanthropy has been kept alive by the Soviet authorities themselves through the propaganda campaign against the ARA. There is a continuing reinterpretation.<sup>16</sup>

- Benjamin Weissman (1974)  
Historian

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The state of relations between the United States and Russia can be inferred from how American and Russian historians have written on the American Relief Administration's efforts in the early 1920s, as it is directly reflected in their varying interpretations and portrayals. As historian Benjamin Weissman summarizes, there is a "continuing reinterpretation" of this intimate engagement between the two nations.<sup>17</sup> In the US, after a short period of excitement and sympathy, historians have generally avoided writing on the topic so much so that it is virtually all but forgotten presently. Even by the 1970s, the only American studies of it were the two

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<sup>14</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 56.

<sup>15</sup> Benjamin M. Weissman, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia: 1921-1923* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974), xi.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 184.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, xi.

commissioned by Herbert Hoover himself in 1927, written by the ARA's official historian Harold H. Fisher and the ARA's special investigators Frank Alfred Golder and Lincoln Hutchinson.<sup>18</sup> In Russia, historians have written more negatively on the topic. An entry in *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, published by the Soviet state, in 1926 defined the ARA as "a philanthropic organization set up by Hoover to feed the starving children of Europe."<sup>19</sup> An entry in a Soviet history textbook from 1962, by contrast, focused on the ARA's ulterior motives: "When the famine struck, the counterrevolutionary forces in America rose with new vigor. Hoover decided that the movement had come for a revival of his campaign against Bolshevism. Through the ARA, the United States expected to gather information, establish contacts with anti-Soviet elements, and secretly organize an insurrectionary force."<sup>20</sup> As international relations grew more tense with the coming of the Cold War, consciously preserving the objective historical memory of famine relief efforts became less and less of a priority.

The chief historical works utilized in this paper fit into different ends of this spectrum. This study takes from those original historical works personally commissioned by Hoover in 1927, Harold H. Fisher's *The Famine in Soviet Russia 1919-1923: The Operations of The American Relief Administration* and Frank Alfred Golder and Lincoln Hutchinson's *On The Trail of the Russian Famine*. It also utilizes works published during the Cold War period by drawing from Benjamin Weissman's 1974 publication, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia: 1921-1923*. This paper primarily focuses on a collection of oral history interviews with American Relief Administration members conducted by the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library

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<sup>18</sup> Benjamin M. Weissman, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia: 1921-1923* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974), xi.

<sup>19</sup> *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia* as quoted by Benjamin M. Weissman, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia: 1921-1923* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974), 184.

<sup>20</sup> A Soviet history textbook as quoted by Benjamin M. Weissman, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia: 1921-1923* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974), 184.

in the 1960s and 1970s. The reader should keep in mind that these interviews, collected four decades after the events that they describe, may have been influenced by lapses in memory or colored by the interim developments such as the Cold War and the rise of the anti-capitalist New Left in the US. Finally, this essay draws on the most recent major undertaking, Bertrand Patenaude's 2002 study, *The Big Show In Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921*. As relations have intensified between the US and Russia again in the last fifteen years since Patenaude's study, this paper adds to the currently held interpretation by connecting the sentiments and attitudes of the 1920s to those of present day. Ultimately, by utilizing historical works from periods immediately after the relief efforts, during the height of polarized politics, and after the conclusion of the Cold War, this paper traces the development of the anti-American and anti-Soviet sentiments that were first presented during the relief efforts.

## **Anti-Soviet Sentiment at the Start**

**Was the Conception of the ARA's Mission Truly as Humanitarian as It Claimed?**

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*Mr. Henle* – Did you get any feeling about [Herbert Hoover] having a sense of accomplishment – that he was doing something...

*Mr. Boris* – Yes, very much so. Very much so. He was very much interested that every man who was connected with the Food Mission do his job. Every one of them. And to see that they reported to him, wherever they went. Everywhere he went there was no question about what race you belonged to. We just fed everyone who was hungry.

*Mr. Henle* – He never asked what nationality they were, what the color of their skin was, what their religion was?

*Mr. Boris* – No, just to have everybody have something to eat. That was his main object.<sup>21</sup>

- Kosta Boris (1966)  
US Food Administration Member, 1918-1919

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<sup>21</sup> "Oral History Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Kosta Boris" conducted by Raymond Henle in Palo Alto, California, 1966-10-02. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 8-9.

In 1921, at the outset of the famine relief, the US and USSR represented polar opposite ends of the political spectrum. Despite this, when asked to describe the purpose of the food mission, Kosta Boris, a US Food Administration orderly and long-time personal aide to Herbert Hoover, still insisted that it was conducted entirely without predispositions under the guidance of a righteous man. This idea that the ‘Great Humanitarian’s’ aid had been completely apolitical in nature was an ambitious claim, and yet it remained a perennial theme throughout the American Relief Administration personnel’s recollections. However, contrary to their portrayals, the Americans found it impossible to keep anti-Soviet sentiment from affecting their efforts from the start. The presence of such a sentiment was immediately evident in Hoover’s underlying motive at relief negotiations in 1921 to weaken socialism as well as the ARA members’ initial view of their efforts and the disaster itself as an example of American superiority. The ARA members were not alone in their strict adherence to ideology though, as the Soviet officials adhered to an anti-American sentiment just as hastily. Since both preemptively viewed each other through an ideological lens, an atmosphere of distrust grew, directing the conception of the proceedings that Boris had confidently declared were marked by an apolitical nature.

## **Humanitarian Claims**

The American Relief Administration members primarily expressed the claim that the mission was formed without predilections through their admiration of the project leader himself. They assiduously upheld the image of Hoover as the dedicated ‘Great Humanitarian’, one solely concerned with helping his fellow man, not sentiment-driven interests. Harold Manchester Fleming, who at twenty-two years old was the youngest ARA member to travel to Russia, explained just how much the team admired him by referring to the endearing nickname they gave

him: “Everybody called him the Chief.”<sup>22</sup> While this simply demonstrates that the men liked Hoover, Fleming’s subsequent claim exemplifies that this reverence was taken to a higher level. When asked to describe him, Fleming remembered only having a “high opinion” of the man he thought to be “the greatest president of the century.”<sup>23</sup> Similar remarks were common among the other ARA members. Marshall W. Tuthill, an ARA member stationed in Russia in 1922, thought that there was absolutely no way a man like Hoover could “harbor selfish motives.”<sup>24</sup> Some members even exaggerated beyond these claims, portraying Hoover as a superman of sorts. The Chief of the Food Package Operation in Russia, Elmer Granville Burland, attributed their success to Hoover alone, arguing that Hoover was “certainly a genius.”<sup>25</sup> Cyril J. C. Quinn, an A.R.A. member from 1919 to 1923, concurred with Burland, noting that Hoover was “a very efficient administrator – he really was.”<sup>26</sup> Kosta Boris, who was constantly alongside Hoover, made the most extravagant claims. According to Boris, Hoover had complete control of all aspects of the effort; “He was very much interested that every man who was connected with the Food Mission do his job. Every one of them. And to see that they reported to him.”<sup>27</sup> To the ARA, the image of Hoover as the epitome of a virtuous and involved leader inherently reinforced the idea that he only had unbiased motives.

As a result of believing Hoover personally incapable of having anything but humanitarian motivations, the ARA members correspondingly expressed their apolitical claim through their

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<sup>22</sup> “Oral History Interview with Harold Manchester Fleming” conducted by Raymond Henle in Antrim, New Hampshire, 1970-07-17. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 3.

<sup>23</sup> “Oral History Interview with Harold Manchester Fleming” conducted by Raymond Henle in Antrim, New Hampshire, 1970-07-17. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 4, 19.

<sup>24</sup> “Oral History Interview with Marshall W. Tuthill” conducted by Raymond Henle in Delray Beach, Florida, 1971-01-29. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 5.

<sup>25</sup> “Oral History Interview with Elmer Granville Burland” conducted by Raymond Henle in Chevy Chase, Maryland, 1970-07-08. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 5, 35.

<sup>26</sup> “Oral History Interview with Cyril J. C. Quinn” conducted by Robert Cubbedge in New York City, New York, 1969-12-03. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 2.

<sup>27</sup> “Oral History Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Kosta Boris” conducted by Raymond Henle in Palo Alto, California, 1966-10-02. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 8-9.

idealization of the organization under his guiding hand as well. They emphasized this impartial aspect of the efforts in Russia with great pride when recollecting, portraying it as an affirmation of American morality. Hoover himself first promoted this image of the project by speaking about it in idealistic terms. He was explicit from the start that “[t]he sole object of relief should be humanity. It should have no political objective or other aim than the maintenance of life and order.”<sup>28</sup> In his memoirs, he made sure to blatantly take credit for what he said at the outright was the program’s main objective – feeding the hungry, especially the children. He boasted, “The free feeding of the millions of undernourished children was American. We ran it.”<sup>29</sup> Hoover’s subordinates then utilized a similar language when they talked about the project, echoing his romantic view of it. Harold Fleming proudly recounted that it had been his duty to “distribute the food non-politically.”<sup>30</sup> Elmer Burland characterized his time in Moscow as “a marvelous example of selfless service.”<sup>31</sup> Kosta Boris, who as previously discussed suggested that race, religion, and political ideology were not motivating factors in the relief process, argued that they “just fed everyone who was hungry.”<sup>32</sup> Western newspapers of the period even acted in accordance to these idealistic portrayals, using language that implied that this project was impartially constructed. George Lansbury, editor of the *Daily Herald*, reported, “They are what they say non-partisan, acting purely along humanitarian lines.”<sup>33</sup> This fervent and repetitive assertion that the American Relief Administration, personally headed by the ‘Great

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<sup>28</sup> Herbert Hoover as quoted by Benjamin M. Weissman, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia: 1921-1923* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974), 29.

<sup>29</sup> Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: Volume 1: Years of Adventure 1874-1920* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), 430.

<sup>30</sup> “Oral History Interview with Harold Manchester Fleming” conducted by Raymond Henle in Antrim, New Hampshire, 1970-07-17. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 8.

<sup>31</sup> “Oral History Interview with Elmer Granville Burland” conducted by Raymond Henle in Chevy Chase, Maryland, 1970-07-08. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 27.

<sup>32</sup> “Oral History Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Kosta Boris” conducted by Raymond Henle in Palo Alto, California, 1966-10-02. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 8-9.

<sup>33</sup> George Lansbury as quoted by Harold H. Fisher, *The Famine in Soviet Russia 1919-1923: The Operations of the American Relief Administration* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), 38.



Humanitarian' himself, was formed without the slightest influence of any preconceived notions or political ideologies was, in reality, ultimately only hollow rhetoric.

## **Underlying Motives**

Contrary to their claims, anti-Soviet sentiment affected the American Relief Administration's mission in Russia from its initial conception. Their inability to remove this sentiment from relief efforts was present even prior to their arrival in Russia in 1921, manifesting itself first in the underlying motive to use these efforts as a means to weaken socialism. It is evident that Hoover went into negotiations with a preconceived negative opinion of the Soviet government through his actions just prior. In 1918, Hoover argued that the Western powers ought "to stem the tide of Bolshevism, for no stability of Government can be maintained in starving populations and stability can be established by placing food supplies in the hands of some government recognized as of stable qualities."<sup>34</sup> About a year before negotiations began, Hoover wrote to President Woodrow Wilson, implying that a relief program in Russia might bring about the collapse of the Soviet Union itself. He advocated undertaking such a program in Russia in order to see if the citizens, after being sufficiently sustained, "[would] not themselves swing back to moderation and themselves bankrupt these ideas."<sup>35</sup> To Hoover, famine relief functions in Russia represented a dire "race against both death and Communism."<sup>36</sup> To promote the likelihood of this outcome, he also immediately utilized negotiations as an opportunity to demand recompenses from the Soviets in order to weaken it further; "I then outlined certain minimum conditions upon which we would undertake the task... They included freedom of all

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<sup>34</sup> Herbert Hoover as quoted by Harold H. Fisher, *The Famine in Soviet Russia 1919-1923: The Operations of the American Relief Administration* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), 31-34.

<sup>35</sup> Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: Volume I: Years of Adventure 1874-1920* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), 414.

<sup>36</sup> Herbert Hoover as quoted by Benjamin M. Weissman, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia: 1921-1923* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974), 29-30.

American prisoners in Russia; full liberty to Americans to administer the relief, to travel without interference.”<sup>37</sup> Clearly, before agreeing to cooperate with Russia, Hoover had a disapproving outlook of its government and surreptitiously hoped that as a result of the ARA’s mission, a reactionary movement against the socialist leaders would take place.

## **American Superiority**

Once the American Relief Administration’s food mission began to take shape throughout Russia, anti-Soviet sentiment then influenced the Americans’ initial view of their own efforts. The ideological differences between the two nations and their current economic situations reinforced their view of this affair as an example of American superiority, which is reflected in the language behind the idea of American benevolence. By framing the relief efforts as an act of merciful charity, the Americans made it seem as if Russia were beneath them in some way. Elmer Burland’s view of socialism as inferior is clear in his bitter statement in 1970 on the development of anti-capitalist attitudes among American youths at home: “A lot of [the younger generation] are leaning innocently toward Russian Communism as an ideal world and they don’t know what a terrible world it is in practice when it takes over.”<sup>38</sup> This feeling of superiority was also evident in his view of the relief efforts, exhibited when he boasted that, “It was that feeling in the United States that since this was a land of plenty and since destiny had been so generous with us, we must help others.”<sup>39</sup> Cyril Quinn made sure that the common Russians knew that they should see the food relief as a great gift from the ARA: “It was your job to see that it came

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<sup>37</sup> Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: Volume 2: The Cabinet and the Presidency 1920-1933* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), 24.

<sup>38</sup> “Oral History Interview with Elmer Granville Burland” conducted by Raymond Henle in Chevy Chase, Maryland, 1970-07-08. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 23, 24.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

to them as a present, or help, from the Americans; that's what you had to make clear."<sup>40</sup> Harold H. Fisher, the Chief of the Historical Department of the American Relief Administration, recorded this superior attitude throughout his survey of the efforts, *The Famine in Soviet Russia 1919-1923: The Operations of the American Relief Administration*. In this supposedly objective writing, he portrayed the US as a savior, declaring that, "into this atmosphere of fatalistic hopelessness came the representatives of that distant incredible land – America."<sup>41</sup> The Americans came to see themselves as God's emissaries, even sometimes interpreting themselves as Gods.<sup>42</sup> (Fig. 1A-C). Anti-Soviet sentiment skewed the Americans' perception of their own work so that rather than seeing it as a testament to the cooperation of two equal nations, they instead saw it as further proof of the Americans' saintly altruism.

The American Relief Administration's adherence to an anti-Soviet sentiment also affected their initial view of the disaster itself. Socialism was immediately blamed as the sole catalyst. Even though they were painfully aware that the nation had suffered massive casualties during World War I, and then underwent a bloody Revolution and subsequent Civil War, they still blamed socialism for the famine. Frank Alfred Golder and Lincoln Hutchinson, the special investigators of the American Relief Administration charged with investigating the food situation and determining the most efficient methods of relief, officially attributed the disaster to "the devastating effects of the whole communistic scheme."<sup>43</sup> Herbert Hoover likewise expressed this claim explicitly, referring to the famine as "the result of Bolshevik economic conceptions."<sup>44</sup> In

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<sup>40</sup> "Oral History Interview with Cyril J. C. Quinn" conducted by Robert Cubbedge in New York City, New York, 1969-12-03. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 15.

<sup>41</sup> Harold Fisher as quoted by Bertrand M Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 504.

<sup>43</sup> Frank A. Golder and Lincoln Hutchinson, *On the Trail of the Russian Famine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1927), 4.

<sup>44</sup> Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: Volume I: Years of Adventure 1874-1920* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), 414.

fact, he even did so on multiple occasions, later recalling in his memoirs that, “The American people were not too enthusiastic over saving people who were starving because of their Communist Government.”<sup>45</sup> Amongst Elmer Burland’s complaints directed towards the Soviets, he demonstrated that he had assumed that the disaster was a result of Russia’s “isolationist government.”<sup>46</sup> Not only did the American Relief Administration personnel consider socialism the cause of the food shortages, but they also believed that by refusing to develop capitalistic practices, the socialist leaders also then made the crisis worse. Rather than using the aid to reinvigorate their agricultural output, Golder and Hutchinson pointed to the Soviet’s adherence to an outdated “communistic land policy” as a mismanagement of American aid.<sup>47</sup> The ARA members’ disdain for socialism led them to blame it rather than Russia’s extremely chaotic past decades and the fact that its newly installed leaders faced a more difficult time controlling the famine not necessarily because of their socialist system but because their government structures were still emerging and evolving. By focusing on one factor and not acknowledging these other significant ones at play, the Americans refuted an equal viability of both economic systems and bolstered their view of the efforts as verification of capitalistic supremacy.

## **Mutual Distrust**

Ideologically based differences between the US and the USSR culminated in a general atmosphere of mutual distrust even prior to the start of the famine relief efforts, straightaway barring sincere cooperation from developing. This is especially evident in the delegates’ negative attitudes during the initial negotiations, where the representatives from each nation clearly

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<sup>45</sup> Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: Volume 1: Years of Adventure 1874-1920* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), 24.

<sup>46</sup> “Oral History Interview with Elmer Granville Burland” conducted by Raymond Henle in Chevy Chase, Maryland, 1970-07-08. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 23.

<sup>47</sup> Frank A. Golder and Lincoln Hutchinson, *On the Trail of the Russian Famine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1927), 4.

entered expecting the worst of one another. The American Relief Administration representatives immediately expressed the concern that the Soviet officials would find some crafty legalistic way to finagle more than was necessary out of them. Cyril Quinn recalled that Herbert Hoover himself warned his subordinates to be wary of this chicanery: “One piece of advice I recall distinctly coming through from him as: Be careful in negotiating with the Russians that you get it all written down because they are very legalistic when it comes to written documents. If it isn’t there, then God help you! If it is there well, you have a chance of arguing about it.”<sup>48</sup> The Soviet representatives worried that the ARA members possessed a sinister motive for offering their help and that they would ultimately try to use this time within the country as an opportunity to undermine their newly asserted authority. Leon Trotsky, the People’s Commissar of Military and Naval Affairs of the Soviet Union from 1918 to 1925, warned Russian civilians, “Don’t be fooled by these Americans who are here. They are bringing in white flour to cover up their dirty hands.”<sup>49</sup> In his memoirs, Hoover noted that the Americans overseas could feel the Soviets’ obvious suspicion, making the sweeping statement, “As a matter of fact no Communist ever doubted that we had some sinister purpose in all this activity.”<sup>50</sup> This distrust of the host country’s leaders, fueled by the benefactors’ distrust, made efforts in Russia vastly more problematic than the ARA missions in the other nations that the ARA worked to feed.

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<sup>48</sup> “Oral History Interview with Cyril J. C. Quinn” conducted by Robert Cubbedge in New York City, New York, 1969-12-03. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 9.

<sup>49</sup> “Oral History Interview with Elmer Granville Burland” conducted by Raymond Henle in Chevy Chase, Maryland, 1970-07-08. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 24.

<sup>50</sup> Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: Volume 2: The Cabinet and the Presidency 1920-1933* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), 26.

## Difficulties in Distribution

### How Did Ideological Differences Complicate the Deployment of the ARA's Mission?

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*Mr. Fleming* – The Communists were always inching, trying to get a little more control. Finally I discovered that you had to operate through underground or through hear-say or somebody telling you or some stool pigeon, and one way or the other you had to find out how it was done – you had to have your own spy system. When we started feeding the adult grain ration, the Communists wanted to get a hold of that, and I had to shut down a warehouse one time until they quit. You had to operate that way. Couldn't get any cooperation.

*Mr. Henle* – The Belgians, of course, were fully cooperative.<sup>51</sup>

- Harold M. Fleming (1970)  
American Relief Administration Member, 1922-1923

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Even though the conception of the Russian project was more convoluted than those throughout the rest of Europe, as the project commenced the American Relief Administration members still tried to approach it in a similar manner. Harold Fleming, however, describes how the ARA was forced to take a more active approach in managing efforts as a result of constantly encountering complications in distribution that were unique to the efforts within Soviet Russia. These unprecedented difficulties stemmed moderately from the country's sheer size, but most detrimentally from the intertwined relationship that ideological sentiment had with the deployment of the famine relief efforts. Out of a mistrust and disrespect for the Americans, Soviet officials not only lacked enthusiasm when cooperating with the ARA, but also even frequently worked to the very impairment of its cause. In attempts to take control over the situation, they limited the information that the Americans could receive, apprehended material goods imported by the Americans, and utilized their secret police to investigate and frighten ARA members. These constant impediments to the ARA's cause are likely what motivated

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<sup>51</sup> "Oral History Interview with Harold Manchester Fleming" conducted by Raymond Henle in Antrim, New Hampshire, 1970-07-17. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 8-9.

Harold Fleming to remember his years spent within Russia as being characterized by exasperating frustration.

## Physical Impediments

Russia's immense size made transporting goods a great undertaking, especially since it was exacerbated by a relatively undeveloped railroad system. (Fig. 2A). Herbert Hoover realized early on that due to the great expanse of land, a "far wider operation" than the 300 Americans already on staff would be necessary to man the project.<sup>52</sup> And so, he relied on the Russians themselves, employing thousands of Russians to unload, transport, and distribute supplies to the disaster areas.<sup>53</sup> However, Harold Fisher, Chief of the Historical Department of the ARA, recorded at length that Hoover's approach did not totally alleviate the issue; "Transportation was a more staggering problem than personnel. There were no railroads."<sup>54</sup> Fisher's last comment was slightly exaggerated, but the railroad system that Russia had in place was so primitive that at times it seemed as if it were nonexistent. He termed them "undependable at best" because they would freeze up in the winter and constantly ran out of fuel in the summer.<sup>55</sup> Even when they were running, they were characterized by sluggishness. A food train would take anywhere from one to four weeks to travel a distance that a passenger train could complete in only fourteen hours.<sup>56</sup> Fisher frustratingly described these trains as "seeming to crawl with maddening deliberation over long miles of track between the ports and the hungry."<sup>57</sup> As the American Relief Administration's mission expanded outside of Moscow and Petrograd, transportation

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<sup>52</sup> Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: Volume 2: The Cabinet and the Presidency 1920-1933* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), 23-24.

<sup>53</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 56.

<sup>54</sup> Harold H. Fisher, *The Famine in Soviet Russia 1919-1923: The Operations of the American Relief Administration* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), 110.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 110, 187.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 187.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*.

became even more arduous. In the large cities, workers could utilize motorcars to unload goods from the nearest train or port to the kitchens.<sup>58</sup> However, Fisher detailed that the further the ARA got from these city centers, the “more primitive” the mode of transportation.<sup>59</sup> In these smaller villages, relief goods were drug by camels, horses, oxen, and even the Russian workers themselves on peasant carts and sleds.<sup>60</sup> (Fig. 2B). Massive Russia only seemed even more so due to excessive amount of time and effort it took to work around insufficient transportation.

## Knowledge Limits

The newly established Soviet government, worried about appearing too weak in front of the Americans, purposely limited the information that the Americans could get ahold of. In order to fare better at evaluations of the famine, the Soviet government constantly manipulated the related statistics in their favor. When they wanted help, they fabricated low production numbers and when they wanted to save face, as it were, they fabricated higher numbers. Harold Fleming exhibited this as he described how frustrating it was to get accurate statistics from the Soviet government, which to Fleming seemed to edit them in order to get whatever it was that it wanted; “The Soviets were playing two roles. They wanted to show they were strong and able and self-sufficient, so they set their grain statistics high. Then they wanted us to keep on feeding them. They built up their hunger and their feeding statistics didn’t agree with their grain statistics. Then we got rumours they were actually exporting grain out.”<sup>61</sup> This lack of information proved frustrating for Fleming to work with, prompting him to generalize that, “We had to gather Russian statistics – the worst in the world – and we had to do our own guessing about the

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<sup>58</sup> Harold H. Fisher, *The Famine in Soviet Russia 1919-1923: The Operations of the American Relief Administration* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), 104.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 99.

<sup>60</sup> Bertrand M Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 222.

<sup>61</sup> “Oral History Interview with Harold Manchester Fleming” conducted by Raymond Henle in Antrim, New Hampshire, 1970-07-17. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 5.



interpretation of those statistics.”<sup>62</sup> Herbert Hoover likewise believed this reputation, thinking little of the accuracy of the Soviet government’s collected statistics. And so, rather than accepting them simply at face value, he instead conducted his own investigation of the extent of the famine, trusting Dr. Vernon Kellogg and Indiana Governor James P. Goodrich to gather the correct statistics.<sup>63</sup> However, even though they compiled their own research, due to the general confusion over statistics, the extent of the famine will probably never be accurately measured.<sup>64</sup> The ARA ironically was forced to stay in the dark on this aspect of the famine that they had come to quell.

Soviet officials’ handling of the language barrier confused communication even more through their insistence on hand-selecting the ARA’s translators. Language was more of a barrier in Russia than it had been in the branches throughout Western Europe, as German and French were commonly known. Most of the Americans knew no Russian, not even those who sincerely tried to immerse themselves in the surrounding culture. ARA member John Alexander, who married a Russian woman during his stay, exhibits this as he made no attempt to learn the language but rather pressured his new wife to learn English.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, most of the Russians knew no English. According to the Simbirsk General Report, the Russian intelligentsia that had spoken English in the “good old days” had emigrated, been killed, or forgotten it from disuse in the four years of the Revolution.<sup>66</sup> This ever-present language barrier meant that the

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<sup>62</sup> “Oral History Interview with Harold Manchester Fleming” conducted by Raymond Henle in Antrim, New Hampshire, 1970-07-17. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 5.

<sup>63</sup> Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: Volume 2: The Cabinet and the Presidency 1920-1933* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), 23.

<sup>64</sup> Benjamin M. Weissman, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia: 1921-1923* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974), 6.

<sup>65</sup> “Russian Relief Romance,” *The New York Times* (New York City, NY), June 1, 1922.

<sup>66</sup> Bertrand M Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 412.

Americans had to rely heavily on interpreters in serious discussions of sensitive political issues.<sup>67</sup> The Americans initially wanted to use Russian émigré interpreters, but were refused this option.<sup>68</sup> Instead, the Bolsheviks, who were worried that the émigrés would badmouth them, appointed the ARA its interpreters. These non-professionals, with a minimal understanding of English, often confused efforts out of their own incompetence. The Americans would often have to resort to the “timeless practice of guessing” to understand them.<sup>69</sup> However, these interpreters also obfuscated communication out of fear. Historian Bertrand Patenaude argued that they would often “refuse to translate words of an American, or to convey their meaning accurately” out of fear of a negative reaction from both parties. While the interpreters generally manipulated conversations by chance, the Soviet leaders themselves made a calculated exertion to do so by speaking through interpreters when they actually spoke fluent English.<sup>70</sup> Since their words were not their own, interactions were made so superfluously convoluted that one wonders why no mention of Russian-English dictionaries was ever mentioned.

## **Import Robberies**

The very material goods that the American Relief Administration imported in order to feed the starving Russian masses were actually a source of contention with the Soviet officials, who were often reproached for stealing them. It had been a stipulation in negotiations that the ARA would be left to decide how to distribute its goods. And so, by stealing these goods to then distribute them on their own terms, the Soviet officials were violating that agreement and as a result causing administrative arguments that then further stalled the famine relief process. Will Shafroth reported that as imports arrived to the kitchens, the local leaders would generally try to

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<sup>67</sup> Bertrand M Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 412.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 413.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 414.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 415.

take the food by giving the typical response: “Well, we appreciate this food, but it won’t be necessary for you to set up this organization. We already have a famine organization, and all you need to do is to turn your food over to them and that’s all that will be necessary.”<sup>71</sup> Cyril Quinn similarly claimed that if it had been up to the Soviet officials, the food would “disappear into somebody else’s basement.”<sup>72</sup> During the famine period, vodka was actually an even more sought-after commodity than foodstuffs, but the only alcohol being brought into Russia by the ARA was pure alcohol for medical purposes.<sup>73</sup> In a time of such widespread need, though, Soviet officials frantically tried to appropriate these supplies for alcoholic government workers starting with the first large medicinal shipment in June 1922.<sup>74</sup> A pattern developed in which they would seize shipments of medical supplies, hold onto them for as many as a few months as the ARA protested, and then finally release them after making use of a good portion.<sup>75</sup> Accounts of abusing ARA medical alcohol occasionally even made newspaper headlines back in the US, reporting cases of blindness and death.<sup>76</sup> The Soviet officials overlooked the fact that these supplies that they were stealing were specifically designated to help quell the disaster that was afflicting their own civilians.

This widespread practice of stealing from the American Relief Administration, at odds with the stipulations previously laid in place at negotiations, forced the Americans to take an extremely active role in supervising the distribution process. This hands-on approach took the form of micromanagement. Will Shafroth revealed that Americans were installed at locations as

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<sup>71</sup> “Oral History Interview with Will Shafroth” conducted by Raymond Henle in Washington D.C., 1969-03-14. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 4.

<sup>72</sup> “Oral History Interview with Cyril J. C. Quinn” conducted by Robert Cubbedge in New York City, New York, 1969-12-03. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 4.

<sup>73</sup> Bertrand M Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 431.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 432.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*.

supervisors and were on the strict order to follow the food “until it actually got to the kitchen.”<sup>77</sup> This forced active role also provoked the ARA members to adopt a more imposing attitude when delivering their orders to their Russian employees. They came to embody the ‘our way or the highway’ type of approach when dealing with noncompliant subordinates. If the Soviet officials “broke into the shipments or interfered” they would impose severe punishments.<sup>78</sup> Most often though, the Americans would simply threaten taking away all relief supplies and returning back to the United States if their wishes were not followed to the upmost. Shafroth clearly remembered Hoover himself sending down the memorandum to deliver such threats: “Inform the Russians that if our shipments are not given priority and don’t get through, the food is going to be cut off from our ports over here; we’re not going to send any more.”<sup>79</sup> Elmer Burland similarly recalled watching his superiors interact with the Soviet workers in this threatening way, “Well, it was very, very difficult to get them to fully cooperate. They did after a fashion, but General Haskell several times had to throw down the gauntlet and say, ‘Unless you will put freight cars at the ports of Odessa and Leningrad by such and such a date...I will have these cargoes which are enroute, sent back.’”<sup>80</sup> Cyril Quinn was even told this information in blatant terms: “Don’t forget Mr. Quinn, food is a weapon – food is a weapon; don’t forget that.”<sup>81</sup> Threatening their Soviet partners in this way revealed that it was not only the Russians that valued having control over food distribution.

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<sup>77</sup> “Oral History Interview with Will Shafroth” conducted by Raymond Henle in Washington D.C., 1969-03-14. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 4.

<sup>78</sup> “Oral History Interview with Will Shafroth” conducted by Raymond Henle in Washington D.C., 1969-03-14. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 5.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>80</sup> “Oral History Interview with Elmer Granville Burland” conducted by Raymond Henle in Chevy Chase, Maryland, 1970-07-08. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 24.

<sup>81</sup> “Oral History Interview with Cyril J. C. Quinn” conducted by Robert Cubbedge in New York City, New York, 1969-12-03. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 15.

## Deliberate Intimidation

Throughout the entirety of the project, out of their mistrust of the ARA, the Soviet government utilized its secret police, the Cheka, to both monitor and intimidate the members. These “troubles with the Kremlin” as Hoover dubbed them, were generally just slight nuisances.<sup>82</sup> Though it was meant to be, the surveillance was not furtive, and ARA members constantly made note of it in their recollections. Cyril Quinn suggested that he was bugged while in Moscow; “The telephone – you could tell it in a minute.”<sup>83</sup> Though obvious, a lingering fear and disdain of the Soviet government’s policing did remain. Indiana Governor James P. Goodrich, who joined the ARA for the majority of its time in Russia, felt that he had to watch what he was caught with in fear of retaliation. In his first letter addressed to his son, Pierre, in 1921 he instructed that he “would have this and any other letter I write you typewritten triple space and file them away until my return. I may want them and am afraid to leave my notes in Russia.”<sup>84</sup> Some members were more disheartened about the surveillance than others. Elmer Burland, for example, approached and joked with his tail, Yaskevitch; “I would say to Yaskevitch jokingly: ‘Well, why don’t you write this down. I’m going there for lunch,’ and so on and so forth, and he would smile.”<sup>85</sup> However this lingering fear of the Cheka was not totally unfounded, as it did make a handful of arrests of Americans during the efforts. No distinct amount has been listed, but the ARA’s official record reported that these were not rare

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<sup>82</sup> Herbert Hoover, *An American Epic: Volume 3: Famine in Forty-Five Nations; The Battle on the Front Line 1914-1925* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1961), 480.

<sup>83</sup> “Oral History Interview with Cyril J. C. Quinn” conducted by Robert Cubbedge in New York City, New York, 1969-12-03. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 20.

<sup>84</sup> James P. Goodrich travel diary, October 1921, Box 17, Folder 9, James P. Goodrich Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library Archives, West Branch, Iowa, United States, 6.

<sup>85</sup> “Oral History Interview with Elmer Granville Burland” conducted by Raymond Henle in Chevy Chase, Maryland, 1970-07-08. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 25.

occurrences.<sup>86</sup> A typical example is Mr. Arsamsov, an ARA employee who was arrested due to his “activities with the White Armies in 1919 and subsequent counterrevolutionary activities.”<sup>87</sup> More mysteriously, Mr. Salomine, an office manager, and Mrs. Tippold, a kitchen supervisor, were arrested with no reason given.<sup>88</sup> The Soviets officials’ distrust of the ARA members and resultant willingness to impede their efforts ultimately hindered their efficacy in controlling the famine.

## **Evaluation of A.R.A. Effectiveness**

### **To What Extent Did Anti-Soviet/Anti-American Sentiments Hinder the A.R.A’s Efficacy?**

[The relief] was so conceived that it could take cognizance of the individual and personal. It did more than save lives peculiarly precious to the new Russia. It brought the healing touch of friendliness to men and women in every social group who had lost more than their goods and their security. For over them, it seemed, had passed in fury the whirlwind of an angry God and about them had crashed the intricate edifice of civilization. Out of the darkness came a friendly hand bringing help and human sympathy from the world unshaken by the storm.<sup>89</sup>

- Harold H. Fisher (1927)  
Chief of the Historical Department of the ARA, 1919-1923

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At the conclusion of the American Relief Administration’s efforts in Russia in 1923, members were adamant that they had been a stupendous success. In his final evaluation, Harold Fisher portrayed the ARA as the Russians’ savior, leading them out of potential destruction. This idea that it had completely quelled the famine in just over two years given the difficulties experienced was a lavish claim, and yet it was recurrent throughout the ARA personnel’s conclusions. However, in contrast to their own deductions, the famine was not totally managed

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<sup>86</sup> Documents of the American Relief Administration’s Russian Operations Vol. III, 1921-1923, Box 18, Folder 1, American Relief Administration Records, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library Archives, West Branch, Iowa, United States, 39.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 40-41.

<sup>89</sup> Harold H. Fisher, *The Famine in Soviet Russia 1919-1923: The Operations of the American Relief Administration* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), 426.

by the time of the ARA's departure. In fact, Soviet officials purposely cut efforts short, fearing that pro-Western sentiment would spread throughout Russia as a result of its prolonged presence. The ARA's withdrawal was met with varying responses from the ideology-driven authorities and the starving common Russian people. Ultimately, a bleak atmosphere of increasing polarization followed the project, in which both nations tried to separate themselves from the other, demonstrated in the immediate suspicion of pro-American Russians. The aftermath of this episode of international relations not only diverged from Fisher's optimistic summarization but the lingering bitterness also exposed the looming Cold War-level tensions to come.

## **Incomplete Relief**

Contrary to the American Relief Administration personnel's own optimistic interpretations of the success level of their relief efforts, the goals of the project were not actually fully realized by the time of their departure in 1923. By the summer of 1922, the constant disagreements between the ARA and the Soviet government as well as within the ARA itself had positioned the future of the relief efforts in severe doubt.<sup>90</sup> This doubt finally culminated in Lev Kamenev's, chairman of the All-Russian Famine Relief Committee, initial announcement in the September of 1922 that the American Relief Administration's help was no longer necessary and then in his official disbandment of the organization from Russia in 1923.<sup>91</sup> However, this claim that the famine had been brought under control, made by representatives of both sides, was specious. Although the American organization had managed to set up thousands of kitchens, administer about eight million inoculations, transport about 540,000 tons of food, and sustain over ten million people for about two years, these accomplishments were still simply insufficient

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<sup>90</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 56.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

in making up for the food shortages that existed throughout Russia.<sup>92</sup> In fact, at the time of the ARA's withdrawal, there were incoming reports that many more remote areas of Russia were actually in worse condition than they had been prior to the Americans' initial arrival in 1921 and that about two million more children were added to the list of those eligible for relief.<sup>93</sup> This is not to suggest that the efforts of Herbert Hoover and the American Relief Administration members were completely fruitless as those ten million lives saved were no insignificant feat, but rather that the organization failed to realize the full eradication of the famine. The Soviet government then, after creating this administrative gap that needed to be filled, took over control of the famine relief efforts itself.

This unattained success upon the ARA's withdrawal was the result of the multiple difficulties experienced throughout the deployment of the famine relief efforts and was ultimately forced by the Soviet officials' preemptive expulsion of the organization. During the course of famine relief operations, several leading Bolsheviks had adopted even stronger anti-American stances.<sup>94</sup> A common assumption then developed among most Soviet leaders that Herbert Hoover's primary interest in this food mission was not saving the starving children as he had stated, but rather something much more sinister.<sup>95</sup> They came to fear that by allowing representatives of the United States to come within the Russian nation, they would leave behind positive impressions of the West and capitalism among the Russian population while doing so.<sup>96</sup> As a result, the American Relief Administration was often referred to as "the wolf of capitalism

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<sup>92</sup> Benjamin M. Weissman, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia: 1921-1923* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974), 189-190.

<sup>93</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 56.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Benjamin M. Weissman, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia: 1921-1923* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974), 199.

<sup>96</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 57.



under the sheepskin of charity.”<sup>97</sup> As the Soviet officials gradually confirmed to themselves that the ARA members were indeed spies and advancers of their policies, they became convinced that the ARA needed to be removed before it was too late to weaken its influence.<sup>98</sup> At the first moment that the Americans’ food aid was not absolutely indispensable, the Soviet government liquidated the organization in Russia.<sup>99</sup> At the conclusion of relief efforts, both the United States and the Soviet Union claimed that the efforts had been entirely successful and hosted dinner celebrations before the very end of this episode of international cooperation. (Fig. 3A). They toasted to a future friendship and to never forgetting what they had achieved together throughout this trying time. But the Americans returned home with no sort of promises from the Soviets as to what further contact would look like or how they would go about initiating it.<sup>100</sup>

## Varying Legacies

The American Relief Administration’s absence was received with varying responses from the Soviet officials and the common Russian people, emphasizing the distinction between how the two groups viewed the Americans and their aid in general. While the Soviet officials were worrying about what sort of political influence the ARA would wield throughout Russia, the greater populace was worrying about where their next meal would come from. As a result, the Russian people were generally very grateful to the American Relief Administration members, who they saw as rescuers rather than a political enemy. So, when the ARA was forced to withdraw, it was therefore remembered among this group as the good-hearted organization that

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<sup>97</sup> Bertrand M Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 676.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 676.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 706.

somehow got them through this difficult time.<sup>101</sup> Nadia de Kanel Slack cherished the very day that the ARA came to her hometown with great affection, fondly recalling, “During these tragic days, one day in particular, stands out in my memory. The day Mr. Hoover came to Kazan while visiting all the ARA branches...Through the years he left an indelible impression of his selfless dedication to alleviating pain in different parts of the world.”<sup>102</sup> Harold Fleming witnessed this deep gratitude as Russian-natives excessively thanked him for the food that they thought had been sent purposely by Americans to their small village; “They explained that half that village had died the previous winter of starvation. So we were invited in...then they prayed for the soul of the ARA...They said it was remarkable that the American people had sent food all the way to this village.”<sup>103</sup> This gratitude was also exhibited through “many gifts which were examples of beautiful local craftsmanship.”<sup>104</sup> Hoover received cards, like the one from the School of Sokolnisky, which read, “We children thank the American Mission for taking care of us.”<sup>105</sup> The responses of the two parts of Russian society resulted in two vastly differing legacies.

## **Bleak Aftermath**

The famine relief project’s conclusion was followed by a bleak atmosphere of increasing polarization, in which both nations tried to separate themselves from the other. This was immediately evident in the arrests of ‘pro-American’ Russians. On April 2, 1924, Moscow newspapers reported that an unspecified number of Soviet Union citizens had been arrested throughout Kiev. These citizens had all been charged with “accepting ARA food in payment for

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<sup>101</sup> Herbert Hoover, *An American Epic: Volume 3: Famine in Forty-Five Nations; The Battle on the Front Line 1914-1925* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1961), 511.

<sup>102</sup> “Oral History Interview with Nadia de Kanel Slack” conducted by Raymond Henle in Saranac Lake, New York, 1968-02-14. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 2.

<sup>103</sup> “Oral History Interview with Harold Manchester Fleming” conducted by Raymond Henle in Antrim, New Hampshire, 1970-07-17. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 10-11.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 511.

<sup>105</sup> Herbert Hoover, *An American Epic: Volume 3: Famine in Forty-Five Nations; The Battle on the Front Line 1914-1925* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1961), 516.

espionage services.”<sup>106</sup> These ‘criminals’ all had one other thing in common – they had all worked closely with the American Relief Administration in some capacity. The Soviet government now, in an effort to take revenge on the lasting influence of the Westerners, in a way, targeted the Russians who had become their friends. Cyril Quinn recalled being horrified that even his personal driver during the relief efforts had been arrested, though he “never found out why he was arrested or heard from him again.”<sup>107</sup> ARA member L’Engle Hatridge was similarly concerned about his coworkers: “I myself am most uneasy over their situation and I gravely fear that many of them are going to suffer because of their loyal service with us.”<sup>108</sup> This sudden development enraged Hoover, and that bitterness stuck with him for quite some time. In his own record of events, he lamented that, “Many of the Russians who entered the employ of the Relief, often for no wages but their daily bread, were imprisoned when our staff withdrew; and our men have never since been able to get any news of them.”<sup>109</sup> A year later, he was still concerned about this and boldly declared in an American newspaper interview that, “While the imprisonment of those assistants continues, it will form an impassable barrier against any discussion of a renewal of official relations.”<sup>110</sup> The Soviet government’s revenge was not lost on the American Relief Administration members in the slightest, instead it added significantly to their anti-Soviet attitudes.

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<sup>106</sup> Benjamin M. Weissman, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia: 1921-1923* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974), 182.

<sup>107</sup> “Oral History Interview with Cyril J. C. Quinn” conducted by Robert Cubbedge in New York City, New York, 1969-12-03. From Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, *ARA Oral History Project*. PDF, 21.

<sup>108</sup> L’Engle Hatridge as quoted by Bertrand M Patenaude, *The Big Show In Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 728.

<sup>109</sup> Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: Volume 2: The Cabinet and the Presidency 1920-1933* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), 24.

<sup>110</sup> Herbert Hoover as quoted by Benjamin M. Weissman, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia: 1921-1923* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974), 183.

## Conclusion

### An Examination of How This Episode Fits Into the Larger Russian-U.S. Narrative

We remember [the help given by the A.R.A.] and we thank you. I consider it necessary to add, however, one ‘but.’ If you and your Allies had not landed your armies, we would have finished off the White guards immediately, and we would not have had a civil war, we would not have had destruction, we would not have been starving. And it would not have been necessary, therefore, for you to help the Soviet people through the ARA.<sup>111</sup>

- Nikita Khrushchev (1959)  
First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 1953-1964

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On June 17, 1923, Colonel William Haskell, Chief of the Russian Operations of the ARA, and Lev Kamenev, acting head of the Russian government at the time, dined together at an unofficial meeting in Moscow. The stated purpose of this congregation was to celebrate the “gratitude, friendship, and the hope of future closer relations.”<sup>112</sup> Kamenev offered to toast to these possibilities, declaring, “In Russia’s hour of need America alone displayed courage enough to come to her aid. We hope that this will be significant of a closer rapprochement in the future.”<sup>113</sup> As previously discussed, Kamenev also then sent Herbert Hoover himself a letter of gratitude, embroidered on silk paper and encased in a decorative box. At the same time, however, the Soviet government was also expelling the American Relief Administration members from Russia before their work was truly completed, out of a fear that they would wield too much anti-Soviet sentiment throughout the country. By Nikita Khrushchev’s administration in the 1950s and 1960s, the weakening idea of a possible friendship had been abandoned.

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<sup>111</sup> Nikita Khrushchev as quoted by Benjamin M. Weissman, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia: 1921-1923* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974), 190.

<sup>112</sup> Walter Duranty, “Soviet Heads Thank America For Relief,” *The New York Times Company* (New York City, NY), June 17, 1923.

<sup>113</sup> Lev Kamenev as quoted by Walter Duranty, “Soviet Heads Thank America For Relief,” *The New York Times Company* (New York City, NY), June 17, 1923.

Khrushchev's own succinct portrayal of this episode of US-USSR cooperation was instead characterized by a mistrust and bitterness towards what he deemed "unnecessary" aid.<sup>114</sup>

So why had that friendship never come to fruition as predicted after relief efforts? This is because, although the ARA members claimed that relief efforts were solely motivated and conducted on a humanitarian basis, they were in fact all along an attempt to sway the people of the USSR away from their socialist ideological views. In fact, immediately after Colonel Haskell left this this celebration dinner party in Moscow, he turned to a reporter to tell him that the American Relief Administration was in fact eliciting a negative response towards socialism from the Russians like it had hoped for. He claimed, "After seeing the result of individualism as typified by the work of the Americans here I can only say individualism ought to be a model for every Russian."<sup>115</sup> In his concluding reports, Haskell remained confident that the ARA had found the success it had wanted all along, suggesting that, "Communism is dead and abandoned and Russia is on the road to recovery", a narrative he thought would be "told lovingly in Russian households for generations."<sup>116</sup> Clearly, contrary to the Americans' apolitical claims, anti-Soviet sentiment in the Hoover administration directed the conception and actions of the ARA mission in famine-stricken Russia. The ARA's anti-Soviet sentiment then reinforced the Soviet officials' own anti-American views, which ultimately hindered the deployment and efficacy of the relief mission. This destructive atmosphere of mutual distrust, predating the start of the Cold War, hinted at the early beginnings of a longstanding ideological rivalry between the US and USSR.

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<sup>114</sup> Benjamin M. Weissman, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia: 1921-1923* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974), 190.

<sup>115</sup> Colonel Haskell as quoted by Walter Duranty, "Soviet Heads Thank America For Relief," *The New York Times Company* (New York City, NY), June 17, 1923.

<sup>116</sup> Colonel Haskell as quoted by Benjamin M. Weissman, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia: 1921-1923* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974), 183.

The Cold War, commonly referred to by historians as the period immediately following the end of World War II in 1945 until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, actually had roots planted much prior. Opportunities for cooperation became constrained by ideological differences, much as they had unfolded in the early 1920s. This mentality first demonstrated on such a wide scale during the American Relief Administration's relief efforts grew rapidly into the hyperbolic polarized fears of the mid to late twentieth century. The atmosphere of mutual distrust present during efforts was urged on by further polarization, proxy wars, blatant competition, and a nuclear arms race that whispered at a third world war.<sup>117</sup> These negative perceptions were adhered to for so long, that they have even survived the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War to this very day.<sup>118</sup> If one looks closely enough, they would find that among accusations of hacking elections, implementing sanctions, and taking opposing sides of the Syrian Civil War, the current intensifying state of Russian-American relations, in certain respects, resembles those of the early 1920s.

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<sup>117</sup> Charles Ziegler, "Russian-American Relations: From Tsarism to Putin." *International Politics* 51, no. 6 (2014): 686.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 671.

## Appendix



Figure 1-A "A Gift From the American People." (©Hoover Institute)



Figure 1-B Russian peasants bowing to Col. Haskell. (©Hoover Institute)



Figure 1-C "America - To Starving Russia." (©Hoover Institute)

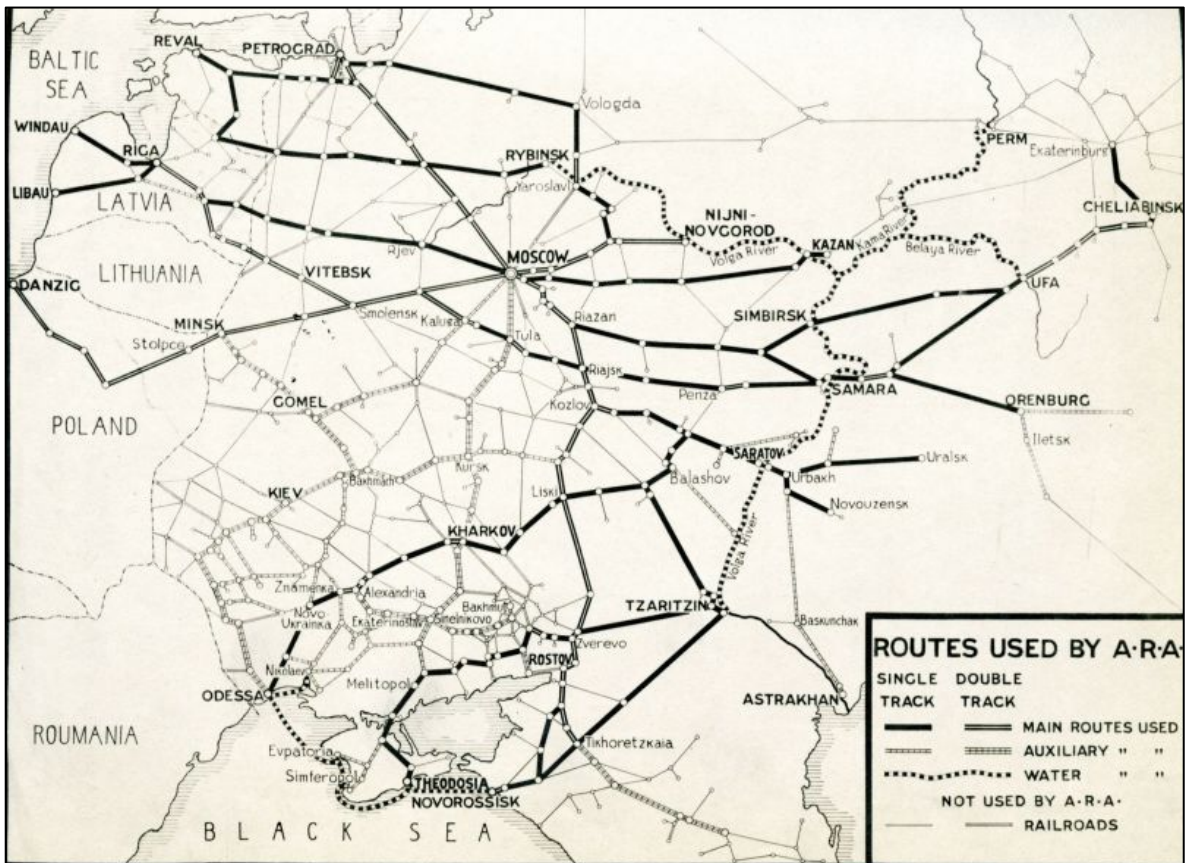


Figure 2-A Map depicting Russian transport lines used by the A.R.A. (©Herbert Hoover Presidential Library)

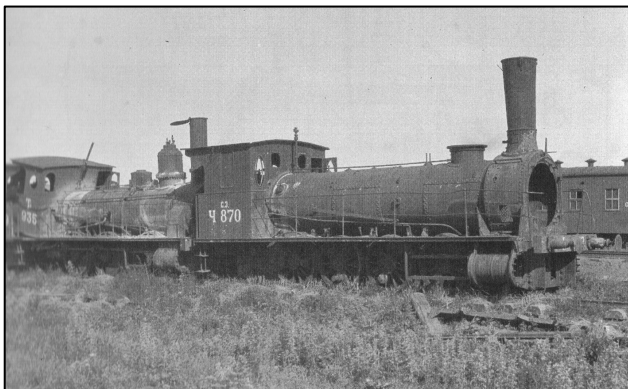


Figure 2-B A "railroad graveyard." (©Herbert Hoover Presidential Library)



Figure 2-C Transporting goods across the frozen Volga River. (©Hoover Institute)



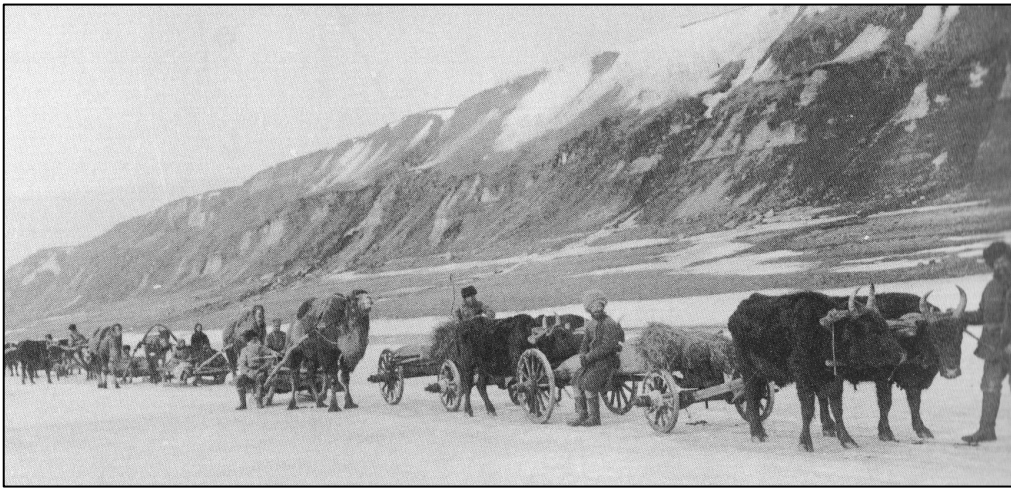


Figure 2-D Transporting goods across the frozen Volga River.  
(©Hoover Institute)



Figure 2-E Transporting goods in Moscow. (©Hoover Institute)



Figure 3-A ARA Final Banquet, Moscow, 1923. [Second From Left, Lev Kamenev. Third From Left, Cyril Quinn.] (©Hoover Institute)

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