

BOLSHEVISM AND CHRISTIANITY:
THE AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE IN RUSSIA (1919-1933)

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ABSTRACT

This paper documents the underlying support many left-leaning Quakers had for the Bolshevik Revolution, displayed through the relief operations of the American Friends Service Committee in Russia from 1919-1931. While the Friends have carried out relief efforts in many areas of the world in their spirit of Christian fellowship, there was added excitement for the work in Russia due to the Bolsheviks' goals of social justice. Therefore, much of why the Friends went, why they stayed so long, and how they were able to achieve so much was due to the influence of communist sympathies in and around Quaker circles. The mission achieved a special place in the minds of many AFSC workers and officials because of these communist sympathies, which eventually blinded many Quakers to the atrocities of the Russian Revolution and the nature of the emerging Soviet regime.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS USED IN TEXT

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)

American Relief Administration (ARA)

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) has served in a variety of manners in many foreign lands, offering relief to any nation and flag willing to receive it. The work the organization carried out in Russia during the 1920s, however, was different: there was an added excitement within the AFSC to work in Russia specifically because many members of the organization sympathized with the ideals espoused by the Bolsheviks. Many Quakers blurred the distinction between personal religious systems and political goals; for some Friends, the vision of how Christianity should be carried out on earth was the same as the purported political agenda of the Bolsheviks. Therefore, much of the reason for why the Quakers went to Russia, and why they stayed so long, was due to the Marxist sympathies of many inside the AFSC. Eventually, the conflation of political and religious goals blinded the Friends to various atrocities committed in the name of the Revolution in the late 20s and early 30s. This conflation was not peculiar to Friends; during the Revolutionary era there were a number of “red priests” from the Orthodox Church who genuinely saw a natural marriage between Christian and Bolshevik principles.

This paper draws primarily on the AFSC archives for its conclusions; the personal papers of Rufus Jones, AFSC chairman and founder, are also used. In addition, this paper also relies heavily on the research carried out by Claire Gorfinkel and David McFadden, authors of *Constructive Spirit: Quakers in*

Revolutionary Russia,¹ the best book on the AFSC Russia mission in print. Gorfinkel and McFadden present a far more nuanced history of the topic than Richenda Scott's *Quakers in Russia*,² which spans over multiple centuries and does not delve into the personalities and beliefs of key members of the AFSC during the 1920s. Despite its use of archives, Gorfinkel and McFadden's history does not properly analyze the conflation of personal, political, and religious beliefs, and also ends too abruptly: the 1929-1933 era is hardly touched at all. Gorfinkel and McFadden therefore miss the period where Quakers were present in Russia during Stalin's era, and the ensuing correspondence between Moscow and the AFSC headquarters in Philadelphia. The correspondence from this era is particularly revealing in displaying how the personal religious beliefs of many Friends led them to overlook or even ignore the barbarism beginning to take hold in Stalin's Russia.

The letters sent back and forth between Russia and the AFSC were particularly fruitful in discovering the motives of many workers in the Russia field. In addition, the articles penned by publicists revealed who the ASFC targeted for donations, by nature of the publicity's pro-Bolshevik content. Finally, the devastating 1933 letters to the AFSC by Alexandra Tolstoy, daughter of the famed novelist and friend to many Quakers, and Alice Davis and Nadia Danilevsky, two of the last Quaker workers to leave Moscow, demonstrate how

¹ McFadden, David, and Gorfinkel, Claire. *Constructive Spirit: Quakers in Revolutionary Russia*. Intentional Productions, 2004.

² Scott, Richenda. *Quakers in Russia*. London: Michael Joseph, 1964.

far Bolshevik sympathies colored the vision of Soviet Russia among those at the AFSC, even at this later date.

CHAPTER 2 BACKGROUND: THE QUAKERS BEFORE LENIN

In the 18th century, English doctors came to Russia to assist those ailing from smallpox, even treating the son of Catherine the Great. Quakers wrote to the tsars various pleas for peace in the wake of the Crimean War, and tried to develop irrigation methods in the Volga region to prevent another famine like that of 1891.³ One of the goals of Quaker missions in Russia was to come into fellowship with anyone who held aims and desires similar to those of the Friends. Through this method, the Quakers came into community with the Tolstoyans, a group of spiritual followers of famed novelist Leo Tolstoy, who were particularly predominant in Russia until the Stalinization of the Politburo in 1927.⁴

Tolstoy's teaching on pacifism made him a natural ally to the Friends. Tolstoy repudiated the dogmatism of the Russian Orthodox Church (and was later excommunicated from it) for explaining what he believed to be true Christianity in his 1884 work *What I Believe*.

“I could not avoid a statement of why I disbelieve, and regard as erroneous, the [Orthodox] Church doctrine which is usually called Christianity. Among the many divergences of that doctrine from the teaching of Christ, I pointed out as the chief one its omission to acknowledge the law of non-resistance to evil by violence which, more evidently than other differences, indicates how the Church doctrine perverts the teaching of Christ.”⁵

Tolstoy explained how his quickest responses to *What I Believe* came from American Quakers, who approved of Tolstoy's teachings and sent him more of their own material to further defend the Christian defense of pacifism.

³ See McFadden and Gorfinkel, *Constructive Spirit*, pp. 19-25

⁴ *Ibid.*, 180

⁵ Tolstoy, Leo. *The Kingdom of God is Within You*. 1893. Quoted from *The Kingdom of God and Other Peace Essays*, London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 1.

“Together with these letters the Quakers sent me their pamphlets, journals, and books, from which I learnt how, already many years ago, they had irrefutably demonstrated that it is a Christian’s duty to fulfill the command of not resisting evil by violence, and how fully they had exposed the error of the Church’s teaching which allows of capital punishment and war.”⁶

Tolstoy at one point had even made his own translation of the Gospel texts, emphasizing the words and works of Christ, and deeming the Old Testament and New Testament epistles to be less worthy of study than stories of Christ’s life. Even more, Tolstoy came to deny any real authority a specific tradition or denomination would have in interpreting theology.

I was driven to the conviction that there was no Church at all. All the Christians with different beliefs deem themselves the true Christians and deny each other. All these separate assemblies of Christians deem themselves exclusively the Church and assure us theirs is the true Church; that the others have broken off and fallen from it while it alone has endured.⁷

Tolstoy emphasized that Christians of all faiths had forgotten the teachings of Christ.

Every Christian church, or rather creed, undoubtedly arises from the teaching of Christ himself, but that teaching gives rise to more than one creed—from it arise all the creeds...they all come from the life and deeds of Christ, that is, the deeds of good...once I saw the deeds of the lives of people who confessed the teaching of Christ, I clung to them.⁸

Tolstoy’s emphasis on Christianity being a religion based on acts of service to fellow human beings resonated strongly with the Friends, who likewise rejected ideas of strict dogmatism. As a general rule, Quakers (and Tolstoy) reject all

⁶ Ibid., 3. See pp. 3-12 for further discussion on Tolstoy’s correspondence with the Society of Friends

⁷ Tolstoy, *The Gospel According to Tolstoy*, edited and translated by David Patterson (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992), 7

⁸ Ibid., 9

forms of ecclesiastical authority, which they find unnecessary, sinful, and ultimately against the true spirit of Christianity.⁹

In fact, Quakers had sought out Tolstoy in various pilgrimages to Russia during the 19th century and found a valuable friend. An English committee of Friends interested in assisting Russia during the 1891-2 famines met with Tolstoy (who was very active in the famine relief efforts and denounced the Russian bureaucratic state for not doing enough) and passed time at his house.¹⁰ Other Quakers kept up the relationship with Tolstoy until his death, and later on befriended his children. This relationship carried over into the Revolutionary era, where friendship with the Tolstoy household and their followers proved to be valuable. Tolstoy's fame meant that friendship with his family was tantamount to protection: "the regard in which Count [Sergius] Tolstoy's father was held by Russians of all shades of political belief procured the immunity of his household from the frequent entry and ruthless interrogations of the secret police. His guests were likewise left alone."¹¹

A group of Quakers, primarily English, came to Russia in 1916 to assist with the Polish refugee problem. These refugees were driven out of their homelands during the Russian retreat of 1915, and they finally settled, among other places, in Buzuluk, an area of the Samara province in Russia's Volga region. Appeals for help were made by Russian ministers, and by April of 1917 thirty-five Friends were working in Buzuluk ministering to these refugees. The Friends set up hospitals and feeding stations, but the subsequent violence brought

⁹ See Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (East Peoria: Versa Press), 579

¹⁰ Scott, *Quakers in Russia*, 135

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 210

on by the civil war forced many of them to work far away in Siberia, or so leave the country entirely. Receiving donations to support the mission was problematic—American sponsors were unsure of appropriating funds in the midst of the chaos during Bolshevik Revolution.¹² Quakers would not play any more than a token part in Russia from 1918-1920.

As drought hit the Russian countryside in 1921-1922, the policies of the previous three years (known as “war communism”) exacerbated the problem, devastating the economy. War communism resulted in hyperinflation, extensive black markets, shortages, and mass starvation, particularly in the cities. The outcome was outright disaster. Class warfare against *kulaks* (supposedly rich peasants) meant that any surplus grain was requisitioned by the state. In theory, this grain was to be used to feed the cities; in practice, the grain was not “surplus” at all, and ended up starving peasants of the necessary food to feed themselves or the seed to successfully plant for the coming year. Much of the grain that was requisitioned was done so in the midst of extreme suffering and was later exported abroad even as ordinary Russians starved.

All told, roughly five million people died as a result of the 1921-22 famines. The situation was so dire that the Bolshevik government had Maxim Gorky, the popular writer, make an appeal to foreign countries to help the situation. Humanitarian efforts were necessary to prevent widespread starvation.

It is in this context that the American Relief Administration (ARA) came to work

¹² The AFSC’s first Executive Secretary, Vincent Nicholson, explained this reluctance to Moscow worker Anna Haines, before adding that “confidence in the future of our mission in Russia has not been shaken at any time, and our interest in it has been steadily increasing.” (Nicholson to Anna Haines, June 13th 1918, AFSC FSR, 1918), quoted by Gorfinkel and McFadden, *Constructive Spirit*, p 31.

in Russia, working under the leadership of future president (and Quaker) Herbert Hoover, and feeding more than ten million people a day at the height of its relief efforts in 1921. Certain conditions were placed on the Bolsheviks for the aid, infuriating Lenin, who eventually relented and allowed the Americans into the country since the situation was so dire. The AFSC, in its tradition of Christian relief efforts, worked under Hoover's ARA, continuing the work in Russia that had been put on hold in 1919 and early 1920.¹³

It was for relief efforts such as the Russia mission that the AFSC was founded two years prior in 1917. Conscientious objectors of war were utterly repulsed by the Great War's violence and needed an outlet to find suitable areas of work that would preclude them from using violence. The organization was initially run by a number of different Quaker organizations who chose Rufus Jones, a prominent Quaker activist and intellectual from the New England area, as the first chairman. In determining his vision for the AFSC, Jones "always linked his belief in a vibrant spiritual world with his conviction about the importance of political action in the world."¹⁴ Among the members of the AFSC, Jones was a moderate, which helps explain his ability to work with so many others during his tenure as chairman. Philadelphia-area Quaker organizations had suffered from

¹³ See Benjamin Weissman, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Russia, 1921-1923*, (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974), and 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), for review of American relief operations in the USSR during the early 20s.

¹⁴ Gorfinkel and McFadden, *Constructive Spirit*, 54

doctrinal schisms during previous eras, something Jones was loathe to prevent from happening again under his watch.¹⁵

In fact, it was Jones' magnanimity and tempered beliefs which allowed him to have a close relationship with fellow Quaker Herbert Hoover, someone who harbored no sympathies for the Bolsheviks. This relationship was an important one, since it was through the ARA that American Friends were allowed to work in Russia. Other members of the AFSC, however, were reluctant to work with an anticommunist like Hoover, and instead saw the Bolshevik Revolution as a chance to start a new heaven on earth. The idealized, communal, and equitable society espoused by many Quakers was now being attempted in Russia. A utopian society was no longer a dream; it could be a reality.

¹⁵ Ibid., 55-56

CHAPTER 3
AGAINST THE RED SCARE: WILBUR THOMAS
AND FRANK KEDDIE

No one at the AFSC headquarters in Philadelphia was more excited by the prospects of a Russia mission than Wilbur Thomas, who would serve as AFSC Executive Secretary from 1918-1929. Gorfinkel and McFadden describe Thomas as the “AFSC’S principle champion of Russian relief,”¹⁶ as he was the person most responsible for the viability of the mission over the next decade. Correspondence between Russia and the Philadelphia offices went through Thomas, along with distribution of publicity. Thomas made extensive speaking tours around the US in support of the mission, developing strong ties to radical labor and pro-Soviet organizations who were primary donors to the mission.¹⁷ The Russia work was extremely important to him and later correspondence reveals his communist sympathies. Given his high position of authority at the AFSC, the Russia mission never would have gone as far as it did had someone else been Executive Secretary.

Thomas made multiple points to tell others who he felt most responsible for the misfortune of the Russian people: the tsars. The Bolshevik government, as he saw it, was “working under tremendous handicaps, [and was making] great efforts to meet the situation.”¹⁸ His subsequent letters must be seen in light of the Red Scare of 1919-1921 in the United States. Historian Robert Murray writes that “few occurrences in modern American history have been surrounded with so

¹⁶ See *Ibid.*, 56-57, for a larger background on Wilbur Thomas

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 56-58

¹⁸ Wilbur Thomas, quoted by Gorfinkel and McFadden, *Constructive Spirit*, 57, found in “Food and Friendship for the Russian People,” mss for speech, Dec 12th, 1922, Thomas Papers, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College

much mystery. Few have involved so much exaggeration and fear. None was so fraught with rank intolerance and mob violence.”¹⁹ Thomas’ adverse reaction to this madness is understandable—very few Americans were coming to the defense of the Bolshevik regime; the only existing commentary was hyperbolic lunacy. Thomas tired of anti-Bolshevik propaganda within the States. “Any information which you can send us that will help to breakdown the prejudice against the Soviet Government will be very welcome to us,” Thomas wrote to his workers. “We are interested in creating a feeling of goodwill. It is interesting to see how quickly people change their attitudes when they have the facts before them.”²⁰

The AFSC in general went to great lengths to dispel fear of Russian communism in the USA. The committee found the perfect person who could help them achieve this. Frank Keddie, a Scot who had worked with the English Friends in Russia during 1916 and 1917, found himself in Philadelphia in 1919 after a whirlwind tour of much of the world. Keddie had traveled to Petrograd, Moscow, the Samara province, the Urals, and Vladivostok, just before he embarked for Seattle in hopes of returning home to Scotland. His firsthand account of the Bolshevik Revolution, something of interest to the US government, made Keddie a curious figure to American Quakers, and also to US officials. He had spent his first couple of months in the US speaking on behalf of the AFSC at various Quaker meetings on the east coast, mostly near Philadelphia.²¹ His audiences thought of him like the apostle Paul—as Paul bravely advanced the Gospel, Frank

¹⁹ Robert K Murray. *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), ix.

²⁰ Thomas to Haines, April 1st, 1921, AFSC-FSR, 1921

²¹ “Speaking Engagements of Frank Keddie.” AFSC FSR, 1919

spoke bravely “for the right of [an] unpopular cause,”²² meaning the Bolshevik Revolution. More than 3,000 eager Friends had come to hear what he had to say.²³

On February 25th, 1919, Keddie’s speech to a group of Philadelphians was attended by members of the US Department of Justice. Keddie received unwelcome news the next day: his passport was being withheld; his remarks about the Bolshevik Revolution the night before were just too curious for federal officials.²⁴ Now he had to appear before the US Judiciary Committee, chaired by Senator Lee Overman, the Democrat from North Carolina, for questioning. While most of Overman’s interlocutors in this committee were anti-communists, noted socialists like John Reed also were present. One of the less famous socialists to sit before Overman was Frank Keddie, who was quickly met with hostility.²⁵

“Have you been over this country preaching Bolshevism to our people?”²⁶ Overman questioned. Evidently Overman had read the reports—Frank Keddie had not exactly been condemning the communists in Russia during his speaking engagements. Keddie’s characterization of the Bolshevik Revolution as “an

²² Ann Sharpless, “Comments on Frank Keddie by people who heard him,” AFSC FSR, 1919.

²³ Clara Birdsall to Robert Dunn, March 5th, 1919. AFSC FSR, 1919

²⁴ AFSC Publicity Director to WE Birdsall, Feb. 26th, 1919. AFSC FSR, 1919

²⁵ Overman’s committee was unprecedented in US history, being the first ever “congressional investigation of political activities and opinions.” Initially charged with investigating “pro-German propaganda and activities,” Overman’s committee quickly became a platform for anti-communists to share what they purported to know about Bolshevism and its dangers. The committee “played a decisive role in constructing the image of a radical threat to America in 1919...witnesses went on to argue that [Bolshevism’s] sympathizers in the US were subversives since they were financed and backed by the Russians.” See Regin Schmidt, *Red Scare: FBI and the Origins of Anticommunism in the United States*, (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2000), 136-144

²⁶ Testimony of Frank Keddie before the US Judiciary Committee, p. 13. March 5th, 1919. AFSC FSR, 1919

accelerated evolution” also got mention.²⁷ Man was constantly evolving; Hobbesian barbarism would soon pass. Would the Bolsheviks be leading the way?

“No, I have not been preaching Bolshevism,” Frank answered. “I have been speaking on Friends’ work, and have been answering questions with regard to Bolshevism because I have been in Russia.”²⁸

Overman pressed on. The conversation was testy throughout, as Overman sought to “catch” Keddie at any turn with his questioning. For his part, Keddie ignored the senator, defiantly demanding that he get his “ten minutes” to testify openly as he thought he was promised.

“Now this government that the Bolsheviks have, made up of men like Lenin and Trotsky and Lunacharski and Radek and Maxim Gorky, they are commonly referred to as being atheists,” Keddie explained. It was Overman who had brought up this interesting dichotomy—why would a religious man like Keddie speak up for such avowed atheists like these men? Trotsky would later made a pointed attack against Quaker values in his 1930 *History of the Russian Revolution*, writing, “We must rid ourselves once and for all of the Quaker-Papist babble about the sanctity of human life.”²⁹ Bolshevik antipathy towards religion was no secret.

“I do not know whether they are [atheists] or not,” Keddie continued, “but with regard to their religion, there is more humanity in their religion and their

²⁷ Anna Davis, AFSC Publicity Director to WE Birdsall, Feb. 26th, 1919. ASFC FSR, 1919

²⁸ “Testimony of Frank Keddie before the US Judiciary Committee,” p. 13. March 5th, 1919. AFSC FSR, 1919

²⁹ Leon Trotsky, *The Russian Revolution*, 1930

program of Bolshevism—there is more humanity in it—than there is in our Christianity.”³⁰

Lenin’s personal theology did not matter to Keddie. In his testimony to Overman, Frank Keddie renounced the revolutionary violence, but explained that he was “in favor of what they [the Bolsheviks] were trying to do, trying to create.”³¹ In these early stages of the Russian Revolution, Frank sympathized with the Bolsheviks because his ideals of social justice were so similar to the purported ideals of the Bolsheviks. He had witnessed much of the violence that came with the revolution, and had even been thrown in jail by the Bolsheviks, yet saw such potential in the Russian experiment that he defended it and “told the real story” during his time in the United States. Frank argued that his opinions on the Bolsheviks were supported by his religious convictions, not because of his politics. True Christianity, as he saw it, was less inclined towards dogma and more about acts of service, whatever the personal beliefs of a person may have been. While not formally a member of the Society of Friends, Frank worked for them, received financial support from them, and spoke on their behalf. His convictions were representative of the viewpoints held by many members of the AFSC during this era, especially Executive Secretary Wilbur Thomas.

Before his senate testimony, Frank spoke at numerous Friends’ meetings along the East Coast to groups as small as 15 people to crowds as large as 500. He answered questions, and there can be no doubt that the thoughts he presented during those meetings were far more emphatic about the Bolsheviks than his

³⁰ “Testimony of Frank Keddie before the US Judiciary Committee,” p. 32. March 5th, 1919. AFSC FSR, 1919

³¹ Keddie, p. 23

testimony to Overman.³² Worry spread over Frank getting into even more trouble when he was ordered to speak before the Senate Judiciary Committee, but the AFSC told officials in Boston not to cancel any of Frank's speaking engagements.³³ Frank's audiences were enthusiastic about his remarks, with one Boston organizer calling Frank's speech "the best meeting ever held."³⁴ They were convinced: "This is the man I have been waiting for...I feel it is the truth all the time."³⁵

The fact that the AFSC paraded Keddie around for the entire month before he was apprehended by the Justice Department demonstrates a primary motive: explaining what they thought the Bolshevik Revolution was truly about. Keddie, being another Friend, and someone who had seen the early aspects of the revolution, was trusted to tell the real story. From all indications, he found receptive audiences everywhere he spoke. Amid the hysteria from the Red Scare, Frank Keddie must have sounded like a lonely voice of reason.

³² AFSC publicity to one benefactor that in the meeting attended by the department of Justice, Frank's comments regarding the Bolsheviks were "the most moderate he has made anywhere in this vicinity." AFSC Publicity to WE Birdsall, Feb 26th, 1919, AFSC FSR, 1919.

³³ Dunn to Birdsall telegram, February 27th, 1919, AFSC FSR 1919

³⁴ Cora Bigelow, "Comments on Meetings held in Boston Feb 28th-Mar 3rd by Mr Frank Keddie," AFSC FSR 1919

³⁵ Ann Sharpless and John Graham Brooks, "After Hearing Frank Keddie," AFSC FSR 1919

CHAPTER 4 THE ACCELERATED EVOLUTION: FROM FOX TO MARX

Frank Keddie's testimony presents the conflation of political goals and personal belief systems among many Quakers. In his testimony to Senator Overman, Frank Keddie told Senator Overman the story of Lazarus, found in the Gospel of Luke. Lazarus was a beggar with no earthly possessions, and was left to fend for himself by scraping the floor for the crumbs that fell off the rich man's plate. His predicament was so pathetic that the village canines would pass by to lick the sores on his feet.

"Something like that was going on in Russia," Keddie explained to Overman. "Ninety percent of the people were living on the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. They were sent away to fight; they were like cannon fodder."³⁶

Keddie's comparison of the Russian people with Lazarus illuminates the mix of the economic, political, and theological into his social vision. The Russian Revolution was about the people taking what was rightfully theirs; this undertaking would bring a proper democracy into the Russian political sphere, and moreover, it was Godly. The poor man, Lazarus, ended up in heaven, while the rich man was thrown into hell, begging Lazarus for a drop of water to soothe the burning of the flames.

"Instead of being content to live on the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table they [the Russian people] simply rose up and upset the table; and

³⁶ Testimony of Mr Frank Keddie, p 8, F March 5th, 1919. AFSC-FSR, 1919.

that is something like the condition that has taken place in Russia,”³⁷ Frank concluded.

Frank continually referred to the Bolshevik Revolution as an “accelerated evolution” in his speeches to Quaker audiences and in his testimony to Senator Overman. Frank’s vision of man is what is important: human nature was not static, but could change for the better over time. Religiously, Frank’s assumptions contrast with the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity, which asserts that the original sin of Adam and Eve eating the fruit made man completely unable to love God with his own heart. Calvinism argues that man will always be inclined towards evil and serving himself, and it is only through God’s grace that man is able to achieve any good works.³⁸

The belief in man’s total depravity is rejected by multiple Christian denominations, including the Quakers. The Friends’ denial of total depravity is rooted in the idea of Perfectionism, a doctrine explained by the early Quaker leader George Fox. Whereas the Calvinist holds that man inherent sinfulness keeps him enslaved, Perfectionism teaches that man can become free from sin’s shackles. Man can constantly evolve, becoming better and better with time, and is not constrained to living only for himself.

This underlying assumption is what drew so many Quakers towards the Bolshevik Revolution. Rather than viewing man under a good/bad dichotomy, the Quakers saw room for improvement. Frank Keddie’s vision of the Bolshevik

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 9

³⁸ See Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 239-241. Calvinists would point to Bible verses like Ephesians 2:3, where Paul tells the Ephesians they are “*by nature* children of wrath,” meaning something inborn and original.

Revolution as an accelerated social movement was an outgrowth from his beliefs in Perfectionism. Frank explained this idea to Overman with a comparison to medieval Scotland:

“The northern clans used to go out and clean out the other clans whenever the weather was good, and take everything they had...the point is passed where I can go out into your house and take what I want by violence. We are past that stage. But we have not yet passed the stage where if I have a better brain than you, by our present legal machinery I can starve you out or starve other people out by the superiority of my brain; I can dominate and rule and starve out other people, and do it legally. That is what I want to correct.”³⁹

Calvinism, considering man totally depraved, would consider this to be another example of man’s inherent state. But Frank, working under the Quaker doctrine of Perfectionism, saw this as a logical explanation as to where man would be heading next.

In the context of Marx and Engel’s social vision of history espoused by the Bolsheviks, the enthusiasm at the AFSC for the Bolshevik Revolution is more understandable. While man was previously constrained by other economic systems and forced to work for his own good, under the transition to communism a better society could be created free from the constraints presented by capitalism and feudalism. These were not the constraints of human nature, but those forced upon humans by the nature of the economic system. Under communism, man would finally be allowed to flourish. Marx wrote that it was only “after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and

³⁹ Ibid., 32

society inscribe on its banner: ‘from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!’”⁴⁰ Therefore, “only in community with others has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; only in the community, therefore, is personal freedom possible.”⁴¹ Such a social order was the ideal that Frank and the Quakers so desired.

The religious vision of a new social order was not unique to the Quakers. Reacting to the relative loss of faith from their constituents and the corrupting subjugation of the Orthodox Russian Church to the imperial state, various Russian Orthodox priests also sought to merge the revolutionary with the religious. These “red priests” were eventually co-opted by the Bolsheviks, who used the priests’ platform to further weaken the role of religion in Soviet society. Their convictions, however, were genuine: like Frank Keddie, they saw the possibilities of a new socialist order as a chance to spread the love of Jesus Christ. They looked to radically transform the Orthodox Church: “moribund traditions and the status quo were to be replaced by new Christian ethics that condemned capitalism and other forms of economic exploitation.”⁴² True conviction, not conspiracy with the Bolshevik government to merge communism and Christianity, lay at the heart of the priests’ desires. It was not a political but a religious matter. These priests were reviled by more conservative clergy and the general laity for siding with the

⁴⁰ Karl Marx and Frederich Engels, *Basic Writing on Politics and Philosophy*, ed Lewis S Greur (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), p. 119. Quote taken from Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles*, (New York: William and Morrow Company, 1987), p. 106. For a longer discussion of Marxism’s vision of an evolving society, see Sowell, *Conflict of Visions*, 105-108

⁴¹ Karl Marx and Frederich Ebgles. *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1947), p. 74, quote taken from Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions*, p 108

⁴² Roslef, Edward, *Red Priests: Renovationism, Russian Orthodoxy, and Revolution, 1905-1946* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 59

Bolsheviks, but they remained undeterred. “We believe we will win, for the truth is on our side,” wrote one priest.⁴³

Major attempts by these priests for ecclesiastical reforms came during previous crises in 20th century Russia, including the 1905 revolutions. These attempts had failed, but during the famine years of 1921-1922 they were able to forge support from the Bolsheviks since the new regime welcomed any open schisms within the powerful Church. After peaking in 1923, support for their platform slowly eroded and was nearly nonexistent as Stalin consolidated power in the Politburo in the late 20s. These priests wanted to bring Orthodoxy into the quickly changing world brought on by the Bolsheviks. Like Frank Keddie, and many AFSC workers, these “red priests saw no inherent contradiction between radical socialism and Christianity. They consistently hoped to fuse the two, even during social upheaval, terror, and war.”⁴⁴

Not all Quakers were socialists like Frank Keddie. One contemporary Quaker writer explained that there was not “unanimity concerning the economic system in which they [humans] can find fulfillment.”⁴⁵ However, it is easy to see how so many Friends could be so attracted to the ideals of Socialism when considering the documents being produced at Quaker Yearly Meetings during Lenin’s era. The Yearly Meeting of 1918 produced a document with eight specific ideals, designed to work as “foundations for a true social order.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Ibid., 73

⁴⁴ Ibid., 206

⁴⁵ A Neave Brayshaw, *The Quakers: Their Story and Message* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1921), p. 327

⁴⁶ Ibid., 326

1. The Fatherhood of God, as revealed by Jesus Christ, should lead us toward a Brotherhood which knows no restriction of race, sex, or social class.
2. This Brotherhood should express itself in a social order which is directed, beyond all material ends, to the growth of personality truly related to God and man.
- 3...The development of man's full personality should not be hampered by man's unjust conditions nor crushed by economic pressure...
7. Mutual service should be the principal upon which life is organized. Service, not private gain, should be the motive of all work.
8. The ownership of material things, such as land and capital, should be regulated so as best to minister the need and development of men.

The overall goals of the Bolsheviks were very similar to the ideals esteemed by the Quakers, making the new communist order being promised very attractive in the midst of WWI. What is important is Frank's rationale—while he was a socialist, his religious convictions primarily drove him to support the Bolsheviks. Frank was advocating a new system because he was a believer in the “religion of the Prince of Peace”⁴⁷—that is, socialism.

Again, not all Quakers were as enthusiastic about the Bolsheviks, nor did all equate it with the same socialist values that Frank Keddie did. But it is easy to see how religion, politics, and economics could be interwoven. The communal values of the Friends were very similar to the supposed values of the Bolsheviks, making it easy to conflate the two. The evolving vision of mankind was similar on both ends; this assumption serving as the basis for the Quakers' social teaching and the Bolsheviks' economic and political plans. In a more just society, the actions of humans would no longer be constrained by the total depravity feudalism or early capitalism offered. A communal society based on material equality would lift up those formerly disenfranchised by the old systems.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 45

Frank Keddie, along with many other Quakers in the AFSC, considered Lazarus to be oversetting the tables. The Bolshevik party for them was the force that helped to resurrect the collective Lazarus of Russian people. The just society that would surely be found in heaven was also possible to create on earth.

CHAPTER 5 RE-ENTRY: WHAT SHOULD COME OF THE NEW MISSION?

By February of 1919, conditions in the USSR were too difficult for even a token presence of American Quakers to remain in the country. A few workers had been in Moscow, where they assisted the workers of a Tolstoyan home there for orphans of the war, but the uncertainties caused by the Revolution drove them out of the country. The primary question for the AFSC at this point regarded the nature of future missions to the country: would a token group of Quakers return to work in Russia in support of their spiritual allies the Tolstoyans, or could a permanent mission be established? Two British Quakers, Arthur Watts and Gregory Welch, drove this discussion.

Both Watts and Welch had gotten permission to come to Russia in 1920. Welch had previously worked with the British team that came to Buzuluk in 1916; for Watts, who had just left prison after serving as a conscientious objector, this was his first entry into the Soviet Union. Welch came into the country arguing against the idea of a permanent relief settlement, advocating that the Soviet state would provide all the operations, with the Quakers only being able to provide the necessary materials. Welch stated that any long term relief work should be in full support of the Tolstoyans. Much of Welch's bias stemmed from his previous dismissal from Russia by the Soviet authorities and his strong connection to the Tolstoyans, who were markedly against the Bolsheviks.

Watts disagreed with Welch's assertions. He saw possibilities for a permanent Quaker presence in Russia, and wrote stern letters back to AFSC headquarters about those doubting his feelings. "There are thousands of children

who will suffer hunger and cold in Russia this winter. You can only help a few. Are you going to let those few shiver whilst you satisfy yourselves that you are not misunderstood?”⁴⁸

There was an underlying reason for Watts’s enthusiasm—he was a communist. Welch was troubled by Watts’ excitement for the revolution, thinking Watts went overboard in his zeal for the Russian experiment, and considering him a potential danger for the relief. “[Welch] feels Watts takes a rosy view of the Soviet government, is a communist himself, and under his auspices our efforts would be construed as an expression of sympathy with Soviet methods by the Soviet itself,”⁴⁹ wrote one commentator. Watts was quite typical of some of the other philanthropic workers laboring in Russia—“at least those that are all Red,” quipped Welch.⁵⁰ Some in the AFSC were skeptical of working with men like Watts. AFSC officials insisted that any relief work “must not be taken as indicating sympathy with, or acceptance of the political aims for which they [the Bolsheviks] stand.”⁵¹

Indeed, Watts was quite Red. Watts was so enamored by the Bolshevik Revolution that he eventually chose to reside in the country, marrying a Russian and joining the Bolshevik party. His early letters to Philadelphia gushed over the new traditions introduced to Russia by the Bolsheviks, such as the voluntary Saturday labor programs. “I went and did my bit at the ‘Voluntary Saturday Labor,’” he wrote. “I was greatly impressed by this practice and, despite the fact

⁴⁸ Watts to WARVICREL, October 21st, 1920, AFSC FSR, 1920

⁴⁹ Lucy Lewis to Wilbur Thomas, Sept 9th, 1920, AFSC FSR, 1920

⁵⁰ Gregory Welch to Friends Emergency and War Victims Relief Committee, Sept 2nd, 1920, AFSC FSR, 1920

⁵¹ John B Henderson to Wilbur Thomas, Sept 30th, 1920, AFSC-FSR, 1920

that some of our Labor delegates had told me it was semi-compulsory, felt that there was a real spirit of service amongst those who worked and I saw no sort of invidious compulsion.” Watts was always hopeful: “The great lack of material needs was obvious, but the spirit was all that one could desire.”⁵²

His later correspondence with the AFSC betrayed his true feelings, particularly his comments in a letter sent to Wilbur Thomas six months after Watts arrived to Russia. “We feel that the infinite possibilities of the Russian field require unusual sacrifices to ensure a firm foundation. The experiment in government here is worth all our efforts if we can help it a bit.”⁵³ Such feelings spelt out Watts’ hope for the relief efforts—it was more than disinterested relief. Watts came to see a role for a permanent Quaker mission to Russia—as the revolution progressed, Friends could provide a corresponding “change in spirit” to further the ideals of the revolution.

“Quakers, ever since our rise some 250 years ago, have held very strongly that no social reconstruction which is merely material, or which relies on physical coercion, can achieve all that is needed. Unless it is accompanied by corresponding change of spirit, we feel it is bound to fail...similarly our belief in the equality of man has led us to adopt a very simple and democratic form of religious service and management of Church affairs.”⁵⁴

When reading Watts’s correspondence, his motives for large scale relief become more apparent. His desire to aid the suffering Russians in a time of need was evident. But he envisioned more—Quakers would be assisting a revolution that

⁵² Arthur Watts to Friends Emergency and War Victims Committee, July 21st, 1920. AFSC-FSR, 1920.

⁵³ Watts to Thomas, Jan 27th, 1921, AFSC-FSR, Letters to Philadelphia from Russia 1921

⁵⁴ Watts to S Neurtavn, Oct 18th 1920, AFSC-FSR, 1920

would be espousing true Christianity. The promise of communism would be aided by the “corresponding change in spirit” offered by the Friends.

Watts’ pleading for more direct assistance was met with enthusiasm from AFSC Executive Secretary Wilbur Thomas. Even before Watts arrived in Russia, Thomas was ready to resume full-scale work, expressing how “a number of our people have developed a very great interest in the Russian work.”⁵⁵ In the Quaker tradition of bringing about mutual understanding between differing peoples, Thomas worked tirelessly for the Russian cause. Thomas wanted the Quakers to work as ambassadors of sorts to promote tolerance between the USA and USSR. Thomas praised Arthur Watts for his work in this regard. Watts’ report on Soviet welfare projects would allow outsiders to see the various undertakings the Soviet Government was starting on behalf of its children.⁵⁶ In addition, Watts downplayed the role Bolshevik policy had in exacerbating famine conditions, and defended the government’s efforts to halt the starvation in other letters home.⁵⁷

Responding to some of the pleas emanating from Russia at the time for outside assistance, Watts wrote Thomas on what kind of workers he wanted—someone who would “be able to understand the aims of the present government and realize it will take many years of hard work before the ideal is reached.” He advised Thomas to “avoid the man who is a socialist idealist and expects to come to Russia to find a ready-made paradise.”⁵⁸ Watts’ comments are illuminating for two reasons; one, he saw relief efforts as eventually supporting the Bolshevik

⁵⁵ Wilbur Thomas to Lomonosoff, May 28th, 1920. AFSC-FSR, 1920

⁵⁶ Thomas to Haines February 10, 1921, AFSC-FSR, 1921

⁵⁷ Margaret Sackur, May 2nd, 1922, Russian Report AFSC-FSR, 1922.

⁵⁸ Watts to Thomas, Oct 14th, 1920, AFSC-FSR, 1921

“ideal,” something he strongly desired; two, his warning to Thomas against bringing in “socialist idealists” demonstrates that such men and women were readily available for the AFSC’s Russian efforts. Some of these workers later on implored those back home to tolerate the Bolsheviks. “Most of its [Russia’s] leaders are strong, energetic men and whether one likes their ideas or not, they are sincere and honest,” wrote one volunteer.⁵⁹ Others went so far as to bring books from communist printing presses with them as they ventured into Russia.⁶⁰

More workers from the ASFC came into Russia at this time, but massive relief was not yet realized until July of 1921, when Maxim Gorky made a formal appeal to “to all honest people,” requesting humanitarian aid for the terrible famine brought on by drought and the policies of war communism. Herbert Hoover responded to the appeal, and the American Relief Administration came to play a massive role in staving off hunger for millions of Russians. These following two years were when the AFSC had its largest presence in Russia—feeding thousands of people by working under Hoover’s ARA, albeit reluctantly. The groundwork laid by Watts and Thomas were integral to these efforts: Watts and some of the other Quakers in Russia had negotiated settlements with the Soviet authorities even before Gorky’s appeal to increase Quaker aid; Thomas’ contacts with radical labor organizations in the US were essential for any lasting relief. The relationship between the ARA and AFSC would be contentious over these next few years, given Hoover’s known anti-Bolshevik stance.

⁵⁹ “In the Wake of Death and Horror: A trip Across Starving Russia,” p. 7. JF Hecker, Jan 10th, 1922, AFSC-FSR, 1921-23 Misc Reports.

⁶⁰ Anna Haines to Emma Cadbury, Dec 1st, 1920, AFSC-FSR 1921,

CHAPTER 6
“SECURING THE SUPPORT OF RADICAL LABOR”:
THE AFSC AND HOOVER

“Hoover is tolerated, we are welcomed,”⁶¹ wrote Watts, describing how the Soviet authorities treated ARA and AFSC workers. Soviet leaders were annoyed with Hoover, as Hoover saw some diplomatic benefits to providing free relief for Russia and wanted to press his advantage. A separate relief operation run by the Quakers, who gave aid without any conditions, would compromise Hoover. Eventually, the compromise Hoover’s ARA got in working with Russia was that none of his workers would be engaged in any political maneuvering once inside the country. Given that so many of the AFSC workers were so enthused by the communist experiment, such an arrangement was unacceptable to many inside the organization. It presented a number of quandaries: a split with the ARA would mean a loss of money from the ARA. Yet, working with the ARA would decrease the number of donations the AFSC would receive—so many of the organization’s benefactors for the Russia mission wanted to donate through the AFSC specifically because it was not a part of Hoover’s ARA. Eventually, a compromise was made by Hoover and Rufus Jones, where the ARA would hold nominal sway over the AFSC, which would still retain its independence from the ARA, and the AFSC would work specifically in the Buzuluk province. The ARA also gave the AFSC \$415,000, along with support staff and administration.⁶²

⁶¹ Watts to William Albright, Nov 14th, 1921, ASFS-FSR, Letters from Albright to Watts/AFSC, 1921-23

⁶² See Gorfinkel and McFadden, *Constructive Spirit*, pp 62-66 for more details on these negotiations

Hoover, a Quaker himself, was happy to have fellow Friends assisting the relief efforts, but he was also troubled by the benefactors promulgating the Russian mission, who usually belonged to radical leftist groups sympathetic to the Bolshevik cause.⁶³ “There are various groups of Reds raising money for Russia,” Hoover told other members of the European Relief Council. “They are using the Quakers as a cloak. I think the Quakers should take the money. I don’t care what color it is, but the question of fathering such propaganda the Friends must determine for themselves.”⁶⁴ Wilbur Thomas estimated that AFSC ties to radical labor groups would net the relief mission roughly \$5,000,000 in the first year alone.⁶⁵ The publications of these groups denounced Hoover’s ARA, comparing them unfavorably to Quaker efforts. The *New York Call*, a socialist publication, accused Hoover of trying to bottleneck all relief to Russia that was not directly under the ARA in an article titled “Hoover Sabotages Russian Relief.”⁶⁶ Hoover thought the article in the *Call* bore “the imprint of the Friends’ organization,”⁶⁷ and wondered aloud how a religious organization could find so many appealing things in a country run by a regime as anti-religious as the Bolsheviks were.⁶⁸

Rufus Jones denied any Quaker connections to red or “pink” political strains operating in the US at the time, but this was untrue. Jones found himself in the position of playing referee between Hoover and the radical members of the

⁶³ Herbert Hoover to Rufus Jones, November 21st, 1921, AFSC-SEF.

⁶⁴ Confidential Memorandum of discussion of meeting of European Relief Council by James Norton for AFSC, August 24th, 1921, AFSC-SEF 1921, quoted from Gorfinkel and McFadden, *Constructive Spirit*, pp 70-71

⁶⁵ Thomas to Anna Haines, August 6th, 1921. AFSC-SEF, 1921

⁶⁶ “Famine on the Steppe,” Marvin Weisbord, p. 28, 1923, AFSC-GF, 1923

⁶⁷ Hoover to Jones, March 6th, 1922, RMJ SC, Box 21.

⁶⁸ Hoover to Jones, Feb 22, 1922, RMJ-SC, Box 21.

AFSC. “I have do not intend to have [communists] or anyone else use this committee to injure you,” Jones wrote to Hoover.⁶⁹ Jones foresaw Quaker efforts being stalled by communist affiliation, going as far as to admonish members of the AFSC who put pro-Bolshevik thoughts into print.⁷⁰ Jones’ moderation and personal magnanimity were the keys to cooling the tensions between the more radical members of the ASFC (particularly Wilbur Thomas) and Hoover; the strain nearly killed the prospects for continued relief during the famine. “It is an impossible situation to campaign for funds and say ‘give to us and not to Hoover, ’” he wrote to Wilbur Thomas, diffusing the situation.⁷¹

Not wanting to donate to Russian relief efforts through the ARA because of Hoover’s anti-communism, many labor movements led by socialists sympathetic to the Russian Revolution were dismayed with the AFSC teaming with the ARA.⁷² The contempt was so strong that many labor organizations threatened to stop donating to the ASFC unless the compromise with the ARA was broken. Wilbur Thomas wondered whether it was advisable to end the Russia mission completely, since association with Hoover was minimizing the funds received from radical labor. One group especially bothered was American Medical Aid for Russia, a leftist organization affiliated with the AFSC. Ads for the organization could be found in the progressive *New Republic* magazine,

⁶⁹ Jones to Hoover, September 16th, 1921, RMJ-SC, Box 54

⁷⁰ Howard Brinton to RMJ, Oct 22, 1919. RMJ-SC, Box 18

⁷¹ Wilbur Thomas to Names Norton for Rufus Jones, August 25th, 1921, Rufus Jones Papers, Haverford College. Quoted from Gorfinkel and McFadden, *Constructive Spirit*, p 71

⁷² Anna Haines to Wilbur Thomas, September 20th, 1921, AFSC-FSR

requesting money to start a hospital in Russia. The organization eventually became the medical arm of the AFSC, which oversaw their overhead charges.⁷³

It was a difficult line to walk. “We are working on the plan now of letting the labor organizations...distribute through the AFSC,”⁷⁴ Thomas wrote to Jones. Such actions were necessary, given Hoover’s anti-communism.⁷⁵ AFSC officials actively solicited Bolshevik sympathizers to garner money for relief efforts, attracting “a great number of people who are very keen on helping Russia—a great many of them Radicals, some of them Extremists.”⁷⁶ One supporter wrote to the Russian committee about who wanted to donate to the AFSC. “The labor group here in New York has responded to the Russian emergency with unusual strength. I find also that the prospect of working with the Friends organization, instead of with Mr. Hoover, is of almost incalculable advantage to us in securing the support of radical labor.”⁷⁷

Hoover himself played coy with the AFSC, absolving Jones and the AFSC of wronging the ARA. “Now that I know this [anti-ARA publicity] does not originate with nor has no sympathy from the Friends themselves, the whole matter is at rest in my mind.”⁷⁸ But Hoover must have been playing a mere diplomatic role in this instance with Jones, as other correspondence suggests antipathy with some of the AFSC’s ilk, particularly Wilbur Thomas.

⁷³ Letter to H. Kleinart, March 22nd, 1923, AFSC-FSR, 1922

⁷⁴ Thomas to Jones, August 5th, 1921, RMJ-SC, Box 20

⁷⁵ Thomas to Jones, August 18th, 1921, RMJ-SC, Box 20

⁷⁶ Thomas to William Albright, February 18th, 1921, AFSC-FSR, 1921

⁷⁷ Minutes of a Meeting of the Committee on Russia and Poland, Letter by Helen Todd, August 4th, 1921, AFSC-Minutes, 1917-1921

⁷⁸ Hoover to Jones, Sept 21st, 1921, RMJ-SC, Box 20

Whatever Jones' protestations, Wilbur Thomas and other AFSC officials detested working under the ARA. Committee members privately trashed the ARA so much during their meetings that some were driven to write Jones to put a stop to it, lest these true feelings revealed themselves.⁷⁹ Thomas served radical newspapers morsels about the AFSC's work versus what the ARA had done, explaining publicly how he thought "that much more food could have been gotten in if the southern ports had been used first." What Thomas was trying to accomplish with such a statement to the press is unclear, since he awkwardly added that he had "no data and no experience in respect to this."⁸⁰

Hoover responded forcefully. "I am at a total loss to understand your attitude of continued feeding the radical press with incorrect information in deprecation of the organization that has saved the Russian people."⁸¹ His feelings were understandable. Given his other correspondence, Thomas' contempt for Hoover's ARA stemmed from his approval of the Bolsheviks. The reluctance of working with Hoover underscored the connections and reliance the AFSC had with radical groups within the USA for the relief work in Russia.

⁷⁹ William Biddle to Jones, RMJ-SC, February 10th, 1922.

⁸⁰ Hoover to Thomas, June 22nd, 1922, RMJ-SC, Box 21

⁸¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 7
“OF A SEMI-POLITICAL NATURE”:
PUBLICITY FOR THE RUSSION MISSION

Publicity reports written by AFSC men and women on the ground are particularly illuminating in whom the Friends solicited for donations in the Russia field, and also the beliefs of those working for the AFSC. Perspectives on the Bolshevik revolution can be found by examining the writing of Robert Dunn. Dunn worked in Russia during the early 20s, and charged himself with handling publicity for the work there. Most of his papers concern the work being done—how so many thousands of lives were saved by the benevolence of the Quakers in Russia. While not as blatant as other writers, Dunn’s politics become clear the more one reads.

One publicity report regarded Trotsky as “a disciplined revolutionary and great man.”⁸² In others, Dunn contrasted the work being done in one famine stricken area with that of Buzuluk, where he was stationed. Collective farming techniques were being attempted by farmers in the other area, with good results. “They are proud of their fields and of their commune,” Dunn reported to benefactors back home. “They line up with their rakes to have their pictures taken and are pleased when we remark on the contrast between their communal economy and that of the individual peasant.” These were the “bright spots” of Russia, which were not yet existent in Buzuluk. “If they were,” Dunn wrote, “we would not have to write to our comrades in England and America that they must

⁸²“Filming the Famine,” Robert Dunn, p. 2, Jan, 1923 AFSC-FSR, 1923

keep up their generous gifts to the Quaker treasury” to continue the relief work.⁸³

This was the ideal mankind needed to strive for.

Sometimes Dunn used satire to mock the views of those against the Bolsheviks. “He was one of those horrid Bolsheviks,” he wrote, regarding a communist peasant in Buzuluk. Dunn praised the young man for his idealism and yearning for knowledge, finishing his letter explaining how he hoped to encounter another “terrible, blood-thirsty, brutal young Bolshevik” in his travels.⁸⁴ Other times Dunn used personification. In one letter Dunn writes about *kumiss*, a mare’s fermented milk, and something used for healing in rural Russia. No longer would Russians need to drink *kumiss* to feel better—the Revolution would serve as the new “kumiss.”

A new type of institution has risen where the other perished along with the social class that furnished both its demand and supply...its purpose is to make Russians so strong in youth they will never need to go to the *kumiss* fountains when they are older. It is a new kind of *kumiss* for the young; *kumiss* for the new Russia...it needs just a little of this kind to strengthen in the years following the famine.⁸⁵

Dunn saw communal work as the best hope for future prosperity. Citizens who received food should be expected to give back in some way. “Under a government largely administered by Communists it is not difficult to inaugurate a program of this kind. If they are real Communists they understand quite well the philosophy behind such a scheme. And in practice they will make willing cooperators.”⁸⁶

Dunn commended the Bolsheviks for their zeal in nationalizing property.

One piece of publicity has him recounting the story of moving children into an

⁸³ Robert Dunn, July 22nd, 1922, p. 3, Russia publicity, AFSC-FSR, 1922

⁸⁴ Robert Dunn, August, 1922, p. 2, Russia publicity, AFSC-FSR, 1922

⁸⁵ Robert Dunn, August 1st, 1921, p. 4, Russian publicity, AFSC-FSR, 1922.

⁸⁶“Food for Work,” Robert Dunn, August, 1922, Russian publicity, AFSC-FSR, 1922.

oversized mansion, ostensibly owned by a housing speculator. The home would be overseen by the Friends. After the mansion was turned over to the Quaker workers, Dunn tells his audience back home how the neighbors “do not call it ‘confiscation’ or ‘nationalization.’ They remark ‘The Quakers are helping the Famine Committee open a new home for children. They say they are going to give them food and everything. Good.’”⁸⁷ Dunn was neither bothered by the Bolshevik confiscation of church property, appearing surprised that members of the clergy would object to church relics being sold for food.⁸⁸

Dunn’s publicity received strong approval from Wilbur Thomas, who informed Dunn’s partners that it was being “use[d] to very good advantage and...has increased our contributions.”⁸⁹ Some of Dunn’s writing was eventually sent to progressive Left magazines like *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, and *The American Review of Reviews* for publication.⁹⁰ But Dunn’s publicity is mild compared with the work done by later AFSC writers, particularly Jessica Smith. Like Dunn, her publicity for Friends’ work in Russia also received strong approval from Thomas. “I...understand that she is more sympathetic with the Soviet Government than some of the members of the group,” wrote Thomas. “But this need not in any way interfere in her efficiency in this work [publicity], rather it would work in our favor.”⁹¹ Smith’s political leanings sometimes frustrated other members of the Russian group, but Thomas defended her work as he was “somewhat in sympathy with her general ideas and, therefore, [did] not feel the

⁸⁷ Robert Dunn, April 1922, p. 2, Russian publicity, AFSC-FSR, 1922.

⁸⁸ “Church Treasures and the Famine,” Robert Dunn, Dec 1922, AFSC-FSR, 1922.

⁸⁹ Thomas to Walter Wildman, June 6th, 1922, AFSC-FSR, 1922

⁹⁰ WHA to Dunn, Nov 15th, 1922, AFSC-FSR, 1922

⁹¹ Thomas to Walter Wildman, August 4th, 1923, AFSC-FSR, 1923.

same way about her.”⁹² As major Friends work began to wind down in 1923, Smith expressed a desire to work from Moscow, as there was not enough Quaker work to keep her busy writing publicity, giving her time to focus on writing topics “of a semi political nature.”⁹³ Smith’s publicity essentially read the same as Soviet propaganda, entailing all the government was trying to do to alleviate the situation, and long diatribes on the future effectiveness of collective farming. Not only would these new farming techniques lead to enormous increases in productivity, they would also “create a greater possibility of spiritual development, as more time will be left to the peasant for other individual and group activities.”⁹⁴

Smith’s feelings echo those of Arthur Watts. There is a strong hint of assisting the revolution by staving off starvation during the famine years. Smith often brushed aside any missteps by the Bolshevik government with a “Rome wasn’t built in a day” tone. “And if the Quakers can keep them alive until the next harvest by that time the government will be able to give them the assistance that will put them on their feet again.” In this way, Smith figured, Russian peasants would be able to enjoy the “space and freedom of the plains, in a more settled, but none the less free and fine communistic life.”⁹⁵ Dunn clearly read over Smith’s reports with agreement, and encouraged potential benefactors to purchase tractors for the new collectives. Such farmers were “the pioneers of the New Russia and their work should be encouraged by all those who find themselves in sympathy

⁹² Thomas to Wildman, Sept 11th, 1923, AFSC-FSR, 1923

⁹³ Wildman to Thomas, August 27th, 1923, AFSC-FSR, 1923

⁹⁴ “Agricultural Notes,” p. 4, Jessica Smith, September 3rd, 1923, AFSC-FSR

⁹⁵ “Why They Suffered So.” Jessica Smith, Feb 15th, 1923, p 2 AFSC-FSR, 1923.

with the principles for which they stand.”⁹⁶ Dunn loved the idealism of the local Soviet governments; his excitement was clear. “Soviet Russia has a way of making one feel this way. It has sprung many surprises on the world during the last six years.”⁹⁷

The publicity reports sent back to Philadelphia illuminate the magnitude of the Red Scare. Dunn and Smith clearly had intentions of explaining what they saw as the true Russia being built, not the hyperbole offered up by anticommunists back home. In addition, the reports highlight the politics of those working for the mission, and those who supported it. Radical labor organizations chose to donate through the AFSC simply because it was not a part of the ARA. The Revolution was still young; it needed time to get off of its feet. Without the support of radical labor, the AFSC would not be able to accomplish anything in Russia, which is why the reports of Dunn and Smith read as they did: they were meant to appeal to those already in support of the Soviet experiment.

⁹⁶ “One of the Communes.” Robert Dunn, p 3, unknown date, AFSC-FSR 1923.

⁹⁷ “Improvement.” January, 1923, Robert Dunn, p 2. AFSC-FSR, 1923

CHAPTER 8 THE NEP YEARS

Changes in Soviet government policy, coupled with fundraising problems back home, dictated that Quaker relief would begin to decline. War Communism's outright failures paved the way for Lenin's New Economic Policy in 1921, which was a sharp turn back towards free enterprise. The Bolsheviks reluctantly allowed certain sectors of the economy, including agriculture, to operate on a for-profit basis. The re-entry of personal incentives into the marketplace ushered in a period of relative prosperity for the peasants, thus ending the need for outside donors to feed ordinary Russians. By 1923, with the miserable famine conditions behind them, the Bolsheviks were becoming more paranoid about foreigners in the country than before. Soviet officials expressed satisfaction with Quaker work in Russia at the same time they declared that all "relief dispensations' extended to foreign and Russian organizations" would be terminated August 1st, 1923.⁹⁸ Customs duties would commence, and outside organizations would be expected to shoulder more of the costs for transportation. Soviet officials also began to request monetary contributions in lieu of food.

Donations back home in Philadelphia also waned as the 1920s bore on. People still donated, Wilbur Thomas explained, but contributions were only coming in \$5 and \$10 denominations, not in the hundreds. Thomas was depressed by these developments. "I am very sorry that it has appeared that we were cutting down too much on the allowance for Russia,"⁹⁹ he wrote to Moscow. Thomas was

⁹⁸ K Lander (Representative Plenipotentiary for Foreign Relief Organizations) to Julia Branson, Jun 27th, 1923, AFSC-FSR, 1923.

⁹⁹ Thomas to Haines, August 5th, 1925, AFSC-FSR, 1925

not giving up, however, as he continued to send out thousands of appeals for donations.¹⁰⁰ Some of the replies he received were quite nasty, panning the Soviets and their platform. Thomas continued the fight against what he perceived as misinformation on the part of the American media. “I think we have much to do to encourage our people to think more sanely about the Russian people.”¹⁰¹ The work in Russia had to continue: “The future of Russia has such a great bearing on the future of the world that I feel very strongly that Friends should keep in touch with the whole situation. We have much that can be given to help them in their time of need...”¹⁰² This would be an act of worship: “we are trying to demonstrate the practicability of real Christianity. It is an effort to apply Christian principals to the everyday affairs of life.”¹⁰³

It was the conflation of personal belief systems and politics that explains Quaker attitudes towards the Russian experiment during the 1920s. Gorfinkel and McFadden sum up many of these attitudes nicely, writing that members of the ASFC had a “hope shared by many people: that Quaker ideals and Soviet models were compatible with each other, and together they might lead to the new, more equitable society that both were seeking.”¹⁰⁴ Such hopes, however, continued long after it became clear what type of society was being built. Overlooking the violent nature of the Bolshevik Revolution was understandable in 1919 as Americans and Europeans had just stopped slaughtering each other on Europe’s battlefields. Yet the AFSC continued to ignore Bolshevik violence, all the way from the Civil War

¹⁰⁰ Thomas to Dorice White, Sept 28th, 1925, AFSC-FSR, 1925

¹⁰¹ Thomas to White, November 24th, 1924, AFSC-FSR, 1925

¹⁰² Thomas to Haines, April 9th, 1926, AFSC-FSR, 1926

¹⁰³ Thomas to Haines and White, August 14th, 1926, AFSC-FSR, 1926

¹⁰⁴ Gorfinkel and McFadden, *Constructive Spirit*, 152.

period through the failed policies of war communism, and through at least the first six years of the Stalinist era into 1933.

When famine conditions were at their worst, letters back to Philadelphia never mentioned the near criminal activity of Bolshevik officers in requisitioning peasants' grain. Any criticism of civil war tactics was always weathered by hope of a better Russia that was to come. Absent from Quaker accounts are tales of Bolshevik terror in the countryside, or the ruthless arrests and executions by the Cheka in the cities, or the creation and expansion of the system of concentration camps for political enemies. As the NEP ushered in a period of relative calm from 1921-1927, Quaker correspondence shifted from discussions regarding famine conditions to ideas for new projects, usually involving medicine.

As Joseph Stalin began to consolidate his power in the Politburo in 1927, the relative calm over the NEP years disappeared. AFSC members failed to see the regression back into terror. Emma Cadbury presents one of the best examples of the failure to discover the true nature of the Bolsheviks.

Cadbury was a distant relative of the famed chocolate confectioner John Cadbury (whose family name ranks among the most famous Quakers), and was the sister to Henry Cadbury, one of the founding members of the AFSC. Emma Cadbury visited the Soviet Union in 1928 and reported back praiseworthy comments on what was happening.¹⁰⁵ She opened her letter by quoting from a

¹⁰⁵ Cadbury almost certainly was given a "tour" by Soviet authorities during her stay, which colored her visit. That said, through her letter it is also apparent that Cadbury had a lot of time by herself with the Quaker workers and Alexandra Tolstoy, so not all of her experiences carried the tint of Soviet minders. See Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

famous Quaker document, revealing her conflation of personal beliefs and political goals:

In a statement of the points of general agreement on which the Fellowship of Reconciliation was based in the United States, the following assertion included:

That the love revealed in Christ profoundly reverences personality; strives to create an order of Society which suffers no individual to be exploited for the profit and pleasure of another, but assures to each the means of development for his highest usefulness.

For those who accept the truth of this statement and realize the difficulty of [expressing it] even in our individual lives and spheres under the present political and social conditions, there must be a peculiar interest in the Union of Soviet Republics which has made a bold effort to create a state which shall insure freedom from exploitation and opportunity for fullness of life at least to that working class which in most countries is the one which suffers most...

Day by day...came new appreciation of the ideals and the achievements of the new regime, as I visited various interesting institutions for the welfare of the people and talked with enthusiastic workers, and fresh appreciation also of the art and culture of the old regime as revealed in museums and churches, and in the guarded speech of those who had known and loved it. Even these [people] saw much good in the present masters of Russia, and one was filled with admiration for their self-sacrificing dedication to the service in cooperation with the Soviet officials, with magnanimous forgiveness and loss through the revolution.

In Moscow...the stability and permanence of the present government seemed unquestioned, and one had a strong sense that the industrial proletariat was really ruling and was taking its responsibility most seriously, with freedom to criticize the highest officials for any failure to promote the good of the people...

One watches with keen interest to see what will happen. A student of Social and Political Science once said to me, 'In Russia for the first time Socialist theories have had a full chance to be tried out. Where the experiment has shown them impractical new methods are adopted.' Already this Socialist government has proved itself capable of a big readjustment. One may hope it is living enough to do so again and again.

For, taken in all, the Soviet Government in Russia is a great challenge to our so-called Christian order, and while passing examination on what we feel is wrong stirs the hope that there is a chance of a better day when 'no individual will be exploited for the profit and pleasure of another, but to

each will be assured the means of development for his highest usefulness!’¹⁰⁶

By this point, relief work was down to a handful of workers volunteering in Moscow. Cadbury saw a lot of things that conflicted with her positive feelings towards the communist experiment in Russia. She saw militia forcing peasants to sell their bread, and sensed the disparity in power between proletarians and peasants, yet praised the country for its equality in the same letter. She saw hints of class warfare against wealthier citizens. Most importantly, she had spent time with Alexandra Tolstoy, the youngest daughter of the famed *War and Peace* author, a noted anti-communist, and someone who must have impressed her feelings onto Cadbury. Alexandra Tolstoy had been thrown in jail by the Bolsheviks during the civil war, and would later admonish the AFSC Foreign Service Committee for wanting to recognize Russia. It is inconceivable that Tolstoy failed to describe the burgeoning horrors of the early Stalinist period to Cadbury, whose inquisitive nature was apparent in her letter. Yet, Cadbury chose what she wanted to see. It was her religious convictions that led to her concluding that “the Soviet government in Russia is a great challenge to our so-called Christian order.”

In an anonymous June 1929 letter sent to Cadbury (almost certainly penned by Moscow volunteer Alice Davis), the writer warned of trouble ahead.

This is going to [you] through a friend, so that I can take a long breath and tell [you] something at least of what it is not wise to write of through the regular mails...

¹⁰⁶ Emma Cadbury. “Impressions of Soviet Russia,” Cadbury Family Papers, Quaker Collection, Haverford College. Quoted by Gorfinkel and McFadden, *Constructive Spirit*, pp. 152-156

Everywhere people are being arrested, shot, driven from their work, put out of their house, and all for no overt act against the government, but for reasons of class or religious conviction...

The situation about food seems to be going from bad to worse...what I know, of course, is that there is a real crisis with grain and that every day the present policy with the peasants is carried on brings us nearer to a famine, unless the big new government estates can by some miracle carry through enough grain for the cities...for the poor people who are deprived of their right to vote, and therefore have no ration card it is a real tragedy...now a campaign is beginning to throw the same groups out of all the government and cooperative jobs, and in many cities many of them will be thrown out of nationalized houses by October 1...

It is very difficult to know how long such a condition can go on without some violent change. It seems to me that the government is in what the Russians call a position without any exit unless they can hold on for ten years or so while the new Soviet Grain Estates grow up to take care of the bread situation in the cities...As I long ago foresaw, there is no place for people who are not in utter sympathy with all the acts of the government in any administrative post...

I know [you] will use the greatest discretion in passing this on to the people who will be interested, and please impress it on them that they might send any of us on a long and unpleasant journey if any part of this letter should be hinted at in any printed matter or correspondence which might possibly get back here or to indiscreet persons abroad...

In parting do impress America with the real danger for A.T. [Alexandra Tolstoy] if anything of her intention to America should get out before they have a letter or cable from her in Japan. I am so terrified of this possibility that I know I shall be lying awake at night until I hear that she is safely on the other side of the ocean.¹⁰⁷

Tolstoy's escape to the United States was a happy end to the story that ended tragically for so many other opponents of Stalin's regime. The five year plan was now in full effect, along with the great intensification of state terror by the NKVD. Regular citizens were being thrown out of their houses in Moscow to be deported, exiled, or sentenced to the gulag; ration cards were hardly enough to survive, and the "everyday Stalinism" of black markets, fear, and famine were

¹⁰⁷ "Extracts of letter received by Emma Cadbury," June 17th, 1929. AFSC-FSR, 1929

seeping into the cities.¹⁰⁸ The writer wisely foresaw the trouble ahead for Nadia Danilevsky, a Russian woman who assisted the Quaker work, and someone who would be a potential target for the OGPU as anti-religious campaigns were being stepped up. The horrors of the Bolsheviks were now quite apparent to the Quakers on the ground in Russia at this time. As later letters would show, a good number of those in Philadelphia did not comprehend the gravity of the situation.

Given the likelihood of Davis' authorship of this letter, it was probably a response to the enthusiasm of Wilbur Thomas, who had written Davis earlier that year. Thomas, nearing the end of his tenure as Executive Secretary at the AFSC, was either unmoved or uninformed by the increasing Bolshevik violence that accompanied Stalin's rising domination of the country. In a closing letter sent to Davis in February of 1929, Thomas reflected on his time as Executive Secretary, thanked the Russia workers for their efforts over the years, and then explained:

I still believe that Russia presents the greatest opportunity for service of any country in the world. There are more possibilities in Russia for the development of service that will benefit all humanity than in any other country...I am absolutely opposed to any work that looks toward the development of a religious sect—that is not needed in the world. We need to develop those things that will really help out fellowmen, for by so doing we are rendering the highest service. I hope I may continue to keep in touch with Russia, for I am keenly interested in her political and social experiments. I am sure she can greatly benefit the rest of the world by the course she is following at the present time.¹⁰⁹

Without Wilbur Thomas' communist sympathies, the AFSC never would have been able to accomplish so much in Russia during the famine years. Without those sympathies, the viability of the small mission work done in Moscow in the

¹⁰⁸ See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*, (Oxford University Press, 1999) and Elena Osokina, *Our Daily Bread: Socialist Conditions and the Art of Survival in Stalin's Russia 1927-1941*, (ME Sharpe, 2001) for more details on this era.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas to White, Feb 13th, 1929, AFSC-FSR, 1929.

late 20s and early 30s would have been in doubt. Thomas was eventually asked to step down as Executive Secretary, partially because his personality drove many people away, and also because his mind was so focused on the Russia work. Clarence Pickett took his place later in 1929, proving himself to be a more magnanimous Executive Secretary than Thomas, but still evoking some of the same hopes for the Russia mission.

CHAPTER 9
THE END OF THE MISSION IN RUSSIA—
BUT NOT THE END OF ILLUSIONS

Wilbur Thomas stepped down as Executive Secretary on February 1st and was replaced by Clarence Pickett on August 1st, with Thomas still serving as acting secretary during the transition. The literature on Pickett's work in Russia is scarce, barely getting a mention in the Quaker historiography on the topic. Worse, the little mention Pickett does garner is off the mark.

The authors of *Constructive Spirit*, Gorfinkel and McFadden, end the book in an abrupt manner after providing wonderful details on the work done by the ASFC during the 20s. "When Clarence Pickett and Carl Heath replaced Wilbur Thomas and Ruth Fry, both of whom had visited Russia regularly, the Russia work lost its dynamic supporters at the Quaker organizations in America and England."¹¹⁰ In fact, this is not the case at all. Pickett had been to Russia in the early 20s and was known in the AFSC for having a keen interest in the country.¹¹¹ Many of the same ideas and words used by Thomas in the early 20s were echoed by Pickett in the late 20s and early 30s. The optimism for a utopian society still shaped the Friends' attitudes in Philadelphia.

Pickett still saw promise in the Russian efforts, however small they were in this period. He dedicated a week's travel in 1930 going through Moscow touring the city and investigating possibilities for expansion of the mission. His notes from the time period evoke a keen enthusiasm for the country, even as he observed the Bolshevik slogans plastered throughout the city which read

¹¹⁰ Gorfinkel and McFadden, 156

¹¹¹ Pickett's personal papers carried letters from AFSC officials that hint at this interest. One letter, for example, refers Pickett to a language specialist for people to learn Russian.

“Religion is the enemy of industry,” or “if we increase our struggle against religion, we will increase our industrial strength.” Pickett’s comments from his visit show no disapproval or disgust at what he saw; indeed, he took particular amusement in how communist ideology had been introduced to everyday Muscovite life. The children “played political games,” he mused. “The Communists were hiding and holding a secret meeting and the Fascists were out to find and break up the meeting at one school. Everyone wanted to be fascists—they adore spying.”¹¹² Later on in his tour Pickett managed to share a meal with the wife of foreign minister Maxim Litvinov, even meeting briefly with Litvinov himself. Their discussions ranged from Marxian ideology to prostitution, and Pickett’s impressions appear largely positive, judging from the absence of any criticism in his journal.¹¹³ In a later, undated addition to his journal (likely written shortly after he left), Pickett summed up his thoughts: “One could see everything—fear, suffering, hope, achievement, belief in the future. But the indelible impression left on me by this all-too-short visit, was of abounding energy which had been released by the revolution, and the unqualified belief in the future of Russia on the part of all the people one saw.”¹¹⁴ Reflecting later in 1932, Pickett remarked that he came away “deeply impressed with many of the values that came from the revolution.”¹¹⁵ Perhaps compared with the Great Depression that had ravaged the American economy, Pickett was keen to hold onto any glimmers of hope.

¹¹² “Clarence Pickett’s Journal of Trip to Europe,” April 25th, 1930, ASFC-CP papers.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, April 28th, 1930

¹¹⁴ Addition to Clarence Pickett’s Diary. Unknown date. AFSC-CP papers, 1930.

¹¹⁵ Clarence Pickett to Nellie Hester, March 25th, 1932, AFSC-GF, 1932

In 1931, the lease on the Quaker mission was not renewed and the Soviet authorities evicted the two remaining Friends in Russia, Dorice White and Alice Davis, much to Pickett's sadness. In a 1932 letter expressing his chagrin at the closing, Pickett lamented that "it seems the terrible penalty that is now being paid for the long years of exploitation and cruelty under the old regime." Again, Pickett continued to explain all that happened in the USSR as caused by the pre-revolutionary injustices and failed to recognize the consolidation of power under Stalin and its connection to foreigners living in Russia, adding "I know that America is most responsible for all this by her refusal to recognize Russia."¹¹⁶

The question of recognition haunted the AFSC over the next year. Without any workers left in Russia, the AFSC was now only able to assist the people of the USSR from the outside. Since the overthrow of Tsar Nicholas II, the United States had yet to establish diplomatic ties with the USSR, ostensibly over the evils presented by Bolshevism. It is a bitter irony that recognition was awarded to the country in the midst of great terror by the OGPU and during the horrible famines brought on by collectivization that had ravaged the country. AFSC committees debated whether or not to use the organization's influence to push for diplomatic ties between the two nations. Alexandra Tolstoy, now living just outside of Philadelphia in the suburb of Newtown Square, Pennsylvania, had urged the AFSC against such an action in a letter sent January 1st, 1933. Clarence Pickett responded a few weeks later, arguing that any protest against the Soviet government would "play into the hands of the most reactionary and conservative groups in this country." Tolstoy responded forcefully:

¹¹⁶ Pickett to White, April 27th, 1932, AFSC-GF, 1932

Dear Friend:

I will certainly not say that you are unwise, but I do think that you and some of the Friends are greatly mistaken. And I think it is because you do not know!

First of all the Soviet government is not a 'stable government.' It has deceitfully seized the power against the will of the Russia people just before the Constituent Assembly was to meet and the Russian people were to choose their government... It is not stable, because the whole system of government has been changing during these 15 years... Revolts, which are going on all over Russia are convincing enough. Such revolts broke out on factories near Moscow (Ivanovo-Vasnesensk) and the workers were calmed down by bullets and gas...

You say that a protest against the Soviet activity, that means a protest against capital punishment, executions of thousands, famine, exile, and all kinds of tortures of the Russian Christians 'plays into the hands of the most reactionary and conservative groups in this country.' Do you think, that Christ's words: Do not kill, or do not do unto others what you would not want to be done to yourself, become untruths or less convincing because Pharisees or conservatives use them for their causes?...

And...you answer me, that your 'group for the most part favors the recognition of Russia,' the recognition of the Russian torturers and thus, not realizing it, your group is encouraging the dreadful activity of the Soviets, tightening the loop on the neck of the worn out, exasperated Russian people.

What does acknowledgement of a government mean? It means a certain respect, faith, at least confidence in those with whom your government is dealing.

Would you acknowledge, have confidence, or deal with a band of gangsters or robbers? And if you would, would that not encourage them in their activity? And yet the Soviets are much worse than robbers or gangsters. Without risking anything, holding all the power in their hands: cannons, airplanes, gas, they have enslaved, robbed, and are now massacring defenseless people. The Bolsheviks are the most terrible capitalists in the world, for having made a beggar of the people, they have concentrated the capital in the hands of a few. They are the most extreme conservatives, because they are against every form of liberty and freedom.

I wish my father were alive! Perhaps people would have listened to his voice, perhaps he could make people understand that, as in ancient times inquisitors screened themselves behind the name of Christ, thus nowadays the Soviet murderers are screening themselves behind the great and powerful idea of SOCIALISM.

Yours truly,

[signed] Alexandra Tolstoy, February 16th, 1933, Newtown Square,
PA¹¹⁷

Tolstoy's response was clearly meant to shock members of the AFSC Foreign Service Committee into recognition of Soviet realities. The most fascinating part of her letter is her final comment regarding socialism. It shows that the very name of "socialism"—a set of values associated with social equality justice—was effective in concealing the horrors of Russia from many members of the AFSC. The conflation of personal belief systems and politics were still strong, even in 1933.

Working in tandem with Tolstoy were two of the last Russia mission workers, Nadia Danilevsky and Alice Davis, who sent letters to Pickett a scant four days before Tolstoy's letter was received. Both were nearly as forceful in their remarks:

Dear Clarence Pickett,...

All governments do so many things one cannot hold with, that it does not seem right to take favors from them. But it is hard to keep to what we believe.

We have already seen Alexandra Tolstoy's appeal in behalf of our poor peasants. It is very hard to make clear to you our feeling about Russia and the recognition of the Soviet Government...I fail to see any moral advantage in the recognition of the Soviet Government at this time. Having lived through the spring of 1930, we know that appeals from the outside world and the force of world opinion do have some effect on the Soviet officials. It was due to outside pressure in the form of adverse publicity that the worst of the religious persecution stopped (temporarily, at least) and the pressure from America was just as effective as if we had recognized Russia at that time. At any rate, it did the trick and saved thousands of lives. I think that any informed person would confirm this...

It has always seemed to me that many Friends are not very clear in their thinking about Soviet Russia...[you] will remember the difficulty we had in convincing many Friends (if indeed we have done so), that the anti-

¹¹⁷ Alexandra Tolstoy to Pickett, February 16th, 1933, AFSC-GF, 1933

religious campaign was not simply directed against the Orthodox Church and the evil alliance between church and state, but that communism was fundamentally opposed to Christianity, particularly in such forms as Quakerism...It is certain that many false reports are circulated about events in Soviet Russia, but I have never seen any half so terrible and damning as the truths of the spring of 1930—the things that I saw with my own eyes and the things that came to me first-hand from eye-witnesses whose testimony I could not doubt...

If anyone can convince me that forced collectivization, forcible “cooperation,” as practiced by the dictatorship of the proletariat will bring about the true cooperation I have longed for all my life, I shall be glad to shout for the recognition of Russia, even louder than Walter Duranty or Stalin himself...

One thing I should like to ass is that Friends should not be deceived by the use of the word ‘kulak’ in dispatches like those of Duranty. I notice that he has taken to define ‘kulak’ as ‘a peasant employing laborers.’ This is utter deceptive. A kulak is anyone whom the local party thinks might oppose the government. This is a thing that I know personally, for many of our friends were declared ‘kulaks’—people who had never employed anyone in their lives....

I have been very much concerned about the attitude of Friends toward Socialism in general. I find that ‘socialism’ is a very dilute term in this country, but I think that a little study will show that even Fabian socialism is leading toward the ‘reformation’ of society by means of force...the ‘communism’ of Christ was poles apart from this. He did not ‘plan’ his own daily bread or raiment. Surely it is this spiritual communism that Friends are in sympathy with, and not the crude materialism that is the cornerstone of all socialist doctrines...

If our children could grow up with a belief in spiritual values instead of in dollars (or power over others expressed in other terms), if they would renounce all privilege of birth and money and education, everything that would give them power over their fellows—we might be ready to experiment with the ideal state [system of government].¹¹⁸

Alice Davis’ remarks make it clear that the misperceptions and illusions about the nature of Soviet regime apparent in men like Frank Keddie, Arthur Watts and Wilbur Thomas during the late 1910s and early 1920s had carried over into the Stalinist age. Nadia Danilevsky’s letter was more reflective, as she looked back

¹¹⁸ Alice Davis to Pickett, February 12th, 1933

on the early years of the Russia mission and her attitude towards the government after the Revolution:

The first years after the Revolution I believed that the cruelties of the Soviet government were due to war time, that they were afraid of their enemies from within and without, and that they will cease as soon as they have strong power. Therefore I firmly believed that the best thing for the country was to see the government become strong and that the duty of each of us was to do its small share in working for the government—as loyally as our conscience permits...

But as time went on, and cruelties continued and became worse and the Soviet power became stronger and Stalin's policy franker and more evident—I understand that such a regime could not make our people—or anybody—happy and free. Their slogan which we constantly see on posters and in press is: 'Who is not with us, is against us and is our enemy. We should ruthlessly exterminate our enemies for the triumph of Soviet Power' ...Do you understand what it means to be 'with them'...

Do you think it is right to strengthen such a government? I think that Friends should only try to help the suffering people in Russia but not become 'Friends of Soviet Russia,' friends of the government...

And now Duranty (who is always conservative in his estimates and pro-Sovietic) tells of several thousand families through out of their homes in Leningrad and nobody seems to pay any attention...babies froze in the lap of their mothers, and the people did not know what to do first in the morning—dig out holes to protect themselves, or dig out holes to bury their dead...

I feel sometimes that in my effort to keep my promise and be loyal to the Moscow committee, I have not said what I should and that I owe it to my people to tell of their sufferings and persecutions, at least to my friends.

Yours sincerely,

Nadia Danilevsky¹¹⁹

Both Danilevsky and Davis mention Walter Duranty's dispatches in their letters to Pickett, indicating that Duranty's misleading reporting was being taken as true by the AFSC during the early 30s. More importantly, she shows the attitudes of many Friends, herself included, who had put up with previous violence in Russia

¹¹⁹ Nadia Danilevsky to Pickett, February 12th, 1933

because they were convinced it would lead to something better. For Danilevsky, being a witness to these horrors, the truth was apparent. For hopeful Friends back in Philadelphia, who witnessed the excess of the Red Scare, held the similar values to the supposed values of the Bolsheviks, and who read Duranty, the true nature of the Bolshevik Revolution and then Stalin's "revolution from above" was harder to comprehend. It is for this reason that Danilevsky's, Davis', and Tolstoy's letters to AFSC headquarters were all sent within three days of one another: the more ammunition to convince the Foreign Service Committee, the better. In the end, it did not matter anyway, as President Roosevelt declared US recognition of the USSR eight months later on November 16th, 1933.

Pickett finally seems to have come around during this period, evidence by a letter to Joseph Stalin himself urging the dictator to respect the human dignity of all persons within the USSR's borders. Pickett wrote to Stalin about the history of Quakers coming to Russia, pleading the case for political prisoners:

At the present time we have no [contact with Russia], but because of our concern and experience people rightly expect of us a continuing interest. This is probably the reason that there continues to come to us from many sources pleas for help and protests indicating harsh and cruel treatment of certain groups in Russia at the present time. Sometimes they refer to religious groups, sometimes to the Kulak. Whatever the source, we cannot but be deeply touched if the reports that come are true...But with your high idealism and a concern for human rights of certain group's long underprivileged in Russia, may we not appeal to you to use consideration and the deepest human sympathy for those who differ from you in their political and philosophic views.¹²⁰

Eviction was probably the best thing that could have happened to the few Friends left in Russia in 1931. Had they remained, they surely would have ended up in the Gulag as so many other foreigners did during that sad period in Russian

¹²⁰ Pickett to Stalin, June 27th 1933, AFSC-GF 1933

history. The irony was how they entered the country ten years prior, hoping to live the “ideal of a Christian world brotherhood, free from nationalism and politics.”¹²¹ The Quakers came to Russia understanding that not everyone supported the Bolsheviks’ policies, but also believing that “there [was] no coercion by the government to make them work for or support the government.”¹²² To see the Bolshevik Revolution and the regime the Bolsheviks built for what it truly was must have been shocking.

¹²¹ Minutes of a Joint Meeting of the Executive Board and Committee on Russia and Poland, August 20th, 1921. AFSC, Minutes, 1917-1921

¹²² “Report of Expedition to the Baltic Provinces.” AE Hiebert, July 30th, 1920, AFSC-FSR, 1920.

CHAPTER 10 CONCLUSION

Regarding the Russian Revolution, historian Orlando Figes remarked that “man cannot be transformed quite so easily: human nature mores more slowly than ruling ideologies or society.”¹²³ Yet many of the Quakers at the AFSC during the 1920s and 30s did not realize this, instead pinning their hopes on the ideals of the Bolsheviks, only to be eventually let down. The Russian experiment scored a point for those certain of man’s inherent and immutable state of sin: Hobbesian barbarism had certainly not bypassed the modern era. Modern technology had allowed such barbarism to increase and even flourish under the Bolshevik system, and then under fascists and Nazis.

There was great excitement among the AFSC for the Russian mission from 1921 on, not only because so many people were in such desperate need of Christian charity, but also because the relief work was an opportunity to witness a revolution that said it stood for the same Christian principles. The Quakers were of the same coin as the red priests who “saw no inherent contradiction between radical socialism and Christianity.”¹²⁴ True Christianity, as the Quakers and priests saw it, would fight for material equality, social justice, and an end to the economic exploitation capitalism offered. This was not a matter of political liberalism; it was a matter of God.

These motives were what allowed the mission to achieve so much. The famine was responsible for the deaths of more than five million people over the

¹²³ Orlando Figes, *A People’s Tragedy: A History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1997), 751

¹²⁴ Roslof, *Red Priests*, 206

1921-22 years, and that number would have increased by the tens and perhaps hundreds of thousands had the AFSC not played such a large role in alleviating the situation. The desire to, and more importantly the funds needed to accomplish this feat were possible only with the communist sympathies of many key members within the AFSC and those who supported it. Had someone besides Wilbur Thomas been Executive Secretary, or had the famine been in another country, such relief would not have been possible. The AFSC knew this, which is why it actively solicited the support of radical labor in its fundraising. In the grand scheme, motives should not matter here, since so many people were saved through the AFSC's efforts. Hoover was right to encourage the AFSC to collect monies from whoever was willing to donate to the mission.

The motives of assisting a revolution in its infancy and the conflation of personal beliefs with political objectives, however, had deleterious effects. So many Quakers were duped by the Bolsheviks because of the Bolsheviks claimed to stand for, not for what they actually stood for. Other Quakers saw some of the horrors of what Lenin had wrought, and looked the other way.

Frank Keddie had seen the violence. But he ignored it, because he thought that it would lead to something better. Because the Bolsheviks had same ends in mind as he had, Frank allowed the means to supposedly achieve these ends pass by, with barely a complaint. Wilbur Thomas wanted American citizens to see the "real Russia," not the one depicted during the Red Scare, but skipped the negative aspects in his storytelling. Ironically, the fear mongering of the Red Scare came to be vindicated in later years. Jessica Smith and Robert Dunn radiated over farming

techniques that had exacerbated the famine conditions. Emma Cadbury allowed herself to be deluded by the utopian dream even as she saw evidence to the contrary. Clarence Pickett gave credence to a regime that forcefully drove out religion as he worked to sustain his own religious organization in the country.

The spirit of Christian brotherhood helped get Friends to Russia in the first place. It drove many of them to feed the hunger and to serve the meek. At the same time, this spirit became conflated with the politics of one of the most repressive regimes of the 20th century. Unfortunately, the spirit of Christian brotherhood was the same spirit that caused many to overlook the evils of the Bolshevik government.

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