

Colonel Haskell Reports to Herbert Hoover about Russian Relief, August 27, 1923

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Washington, D.C.,
August 27, 1923.

Honorable Herbert Hoover,
Chairman, American Relief Administration,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Hoover:

At the conclusion of my services as your assistant in charge of the distribution of ARA relief in Russia I take occasion to give a short review of the task and its accomplishment.

It is now two years since you undertook to organize the relief of this great famine which arose fundamentally from this sapping of production in Russia but was made more acute by drought conditions in 1921.

During this period a little under a million tons of food, seed, clothing and medical supplies have been bought in the United States by the American Relief Administration, requiring about 250 voyages of American ships to nine different ports serving Russia. These supplies amounted to 60,000 carloads on the Russian railways. Their distribution was accomplished through the organization of 35,000 different stations at the worst period when we were feeding nearly 11,000,000 men, women, and children daily. Not only would these millions have died without this relief, but even larger numbers would have perished from the cesspool of contagious disease which was then raging in every direction.

In the battle against these epidemics the American Relief Administration furnished supplies to over 15,000 hospitals and institutions and organized the inoculation and vaccination of over 7,000,000 individuals. Its systematic campaign of sanitation stamped out the most dangerous center of contagion in the entire world. From seed imported about 8,000,000 acres of land were sown. The worst of the famine was over a year ago but since that time the American Relief Administration has continued to feed, clothe and give medical service to an average of 2,000,000 derelict children until they were past danger, and to provide food and clothing for over 100,000 teachers and professional people as a supplementary service. The American Relief

Administration has furnished over 90% of all the relief that went into Russia during the last two years.

To accomplish this it has been necessary for you to mobilize over \$60,000,000 of which \$24,000,000 were voted by Congress and the balance amassed by you through coordination of various American efforts, through your insistence that the Soviet authorities use their gold resources and through various financial operations inaugurated by you. This does not indeed represent the entire expenditure, for under the Riga agreement with the Soviets which was insisted upon by you as a condition precedent to going into Russia, that Government has paid for all labor, internal transportation, warehouses, kitchens and Russian staff. This has amounted indeed to a very considerable amount of money. Through the margin established by the American Relief Administration in selling food and clothing packages to Russians all over the world for delivery to their relatives in Russia, a sufficient amount has been earlended to balance the entire over-head expenses and leave a substantial balance for charity. Therefore, there has been no cost to the American contributor or taxpayer for administration of the Congressional or other funds.

My task as been that of distribution in Russia, and I wish to take this occasion to express my admiration for the extraordinary ability and efficiency displayed by my fellow directors in charge of purchases, transportation, finance and accounting and other branches of ARA. The successful result of the work has been as much due to each of these divisions as to the final distribution division of which I had charge.

There stands out in all this work the facts that we have had a group of 300 men stretched in a chain from New York to Astrakhan, who for fine spirit, cleanness of character, devotion, resourcefulness and ability have been unequalled. They have done a fine job and America should be proud of it.

I shall not burden you with a recital of the difficulties of accomplishment other than to express my satisfaction that in spite of the lies and misrepresentations concerning the character and object of your undertaking originally circulated by the radical press in this country, that within six months, by religiously adhering to your instructions to carry on without regard to politics, race or creed, we succeeded in obtaining the full confidence of the Soviet Government. After that the cooperation of the Soviets was satisfactory and continued so until the end.

To the mind of the Russian common people the American Relief Administration was a miracle of God which came to them in their darkest hour under the stars and stripes. It turned the corner for civilization in Russia. It lifted the Russian people from despair to hope. Our medical supplies encouraged the medical profession. Our distribution of literature gave life to the scientists. Our free food packages revived hope in the intelligentsia. We purified water systems, disinfected millions of people, opened public baths, repaired roads, required improvement in schools, but above all we demonstrated that at least one organization could exist and succeed in Russia without submission to dictation.

Communism is dead and abandoned, and Russia is on the road to recovery. The realization by the Russian people that the strong American system was able and contained the spirit to save these millions of strangers from the death that had engulfed them must have furnished food for thought.

I should be indeed ungrateful and properly censured by my 300 American and 125,000 Russian assistants as well as by millions of Russian beneficiaries if I failed to express to you their deep affection and gratitude. To you alone who dared to conceive and execute one of the greatest administrative operations to relieve famine in the history of the world is due whatever credit the world sees fit to bestow but among us who felt your constant encouragement, moral support and intimate contact guiding our efforts there will always remain a mystery as to how you could spare the time to maintain such detailed touch with every phase of our work. The will to succeed which imbued all of the Americans in Russia and which was a great factor in the successful accomplishment of that task was a direct translation of your humanitarian spirit to Russia.

To America this is a passing incident of national duty, undertaken, finished and to be quickly forgotten. The story of it will be told lovingly in Russian households for generations. Through this service America has not only saved millions of lives, but has given impulse to the spiritual and economic recovery of a great nation, and on our own behalf we have created, in the assurance of good will from the Slav races, a great inheritance for our children.

Faithfully yours,
William N. Haskell.