

SIR HUBERT WILKINS AND RUSSIA



[George Hubert Wilkins](#) (on the photo to the left - Wilkins during his last Antarctic expedition with Australian flag) was born on 31 October 1888 at Mount Bryan, South Australia, 100 miles north of Adelaide. He was the youngest of 13 children. His upbringing, on the lonely farm at the edge of the Australian outback where he witnessed devastating droughts, was a motivation for his life's work. In 1903 his parents moved to Adelaide and Wilkins enrolled in the University but never completed his courses. He became interested in cinematography and moved to Sydney where he worked in Australia's pioneer film industry. He then left for England to work as a newsreel cinematographer for [Gaumont](#).

After moving to London in 1909 Wilkins worked as a Gaumont cinematographer covering many international events including the Balkans War in 1912. But he still wanted to become a polar explorer. He was offered his first trip to the Arctic as cinematographer with the [Canadian Arctic Expedition of 1913](#) led by [Vilhjalmur Stefansson](#). He walked thousands of miles over unexplored territory, learnt to live off the polar ice and developed his revolutionary ideas for polar travel. In 1916 he returned to Point Barrow, Alaska, to learn the world had been at war for two years.

When he learnt about the war, Wilkins went to France where he was appointed as an official photographer with the Australian War Records Office. From November 1917 until the end of the War Wilkins was responsible for Australia's photographic record of fighting at the Western Front. He constantly risked his life working forward of the front line and refused to carry firearms. He became the only Australian official photographer, in any war, to receive a combat decoration. He was awarded the Military Cross twice. At the end of the war he travelled to Turkey to make a photographic record of the battlefields of Gallipoli.

When he returned to England from Gallipoli, Wilkins learnt that the Australian government had offered 10000 pounds for the first All-Australian crew to fly an aeroplane from England to Australia. The Blackburn Aircraft Company, which had developed a long-range bomber during the war, had entered one of their planes. Wilkins was appointed as navigator. With the other members of the crew, the Blackburn Kangaroo left England on 21 November 1919. They experienced issues with the engines and had to land in France. Repairs were made and the flight continued, but eventually, still with engine problems, the plane made a crash landing in Crete.

After the Air Race Wilkins returned to England determined to continue polar exploration. He joined Dr John Cope on the Imperial Antarctic Expedition. It was Wilkins first trip to the Antarctic, but the expedition lacked funds and achieved little. Next Wilkins's appointment was position of Naturalist in that that was to become Sir [Ernest Shackleton](#)'s last expedition to the Antarctic. This expedition left London on the Quest, a ship that had been hastily prepared and continually gave trouble. As it was being repaired in South America, Wilkins went on ahead to South Georgia Island to photograph the flora and fauna. When the Quest arrived six weeks later Wilkins learned that Sir Ernest Shackleton had died on the voyage.

Wilkins work as Naturalist on the Shackleton expedition so impressed the British Museum of Natural History that they offered him an expedition of his own. The Museum wanted to collect flora and fauna specimens from outback Australia and the islands of Torres Strait. This became the Wilkins Australia and Islands Expedition and for two years Wilkins travelled to remote areas of Queensland, Northern Territory and the Torres Strait filming, photographing and collecting specimens for the Museum. At the end of the two years stint he wrote to the Museum saying he wanted to continue his work in the polar regions.

Wilkins planned to fly over the unexplored areas north of Alaska. He first purchased two Fokker aircraft but found them too large for landing on ice. He sold one to Charles Kingsford Smith who renamed it the Southern Cross and it became the first plane to fly the Pacific Ocean. Wilkins bought a Lockheed Vega. With pilot [Carl Ben Eielson](#) he flew across the Arctic Sea, from Barrow in Alaska to Spitsbergen, Norway. It was the first time such a plane flight had been made and the two men became international celebrities. Wilkins was knighted and chose to be known as Sir Hubert, rather than Sir George.

With the same Vega they had flown over the top of the world Wilkins and Eielson now travelled south to explore Antarctica. They arrived at Deception Island on the Graham Land Peninsula in November 1928. Their flights exploring the Graham Land Peninsula were the first time anyone had flown a plane in Antarctica. Wilkins had planned, if possible, to fly to the South Pole, but on Deception Island he was unable to find a runway long enough to get the Vega into the air with sufficient fuel to complete the distance. Nevertheless it was the first time in history that undiscovered land was mapped from a plane.

Returning to America after his pioneering flight in Antarctica, Wilkins was invited to be aboard the largest airship of the period, the Graf Zeppelin, as it attempted the first around the world flight. Wilkins agreed and joined the flight to make a film record. The [Graf Zeppelin](#) flew from Lakehurst, New York, across the Atlantic to Germany. From Germany it made the longest non-stop flight up until that time - from Germany, across Russia to Japan. From Japan it crossed the Pacific and America to return to New York. Six years later Wilkins would be aboard the airship Hindenburg as it made its maiden voyage from Germany to America.

After a second season flying his Lockheed Vega in Antarctica Wilkins planned his most ambitious expedition. To take a submarine under the Arctic ice to the North Pole. Constant delays prevented the submarine getting away on time to reach the polar ice cap before winter and the submarine constantly broke down. Still determined to prove that submarine travel under the ice was possible, Wilkins continued north to the edge of the ice pack to discover his submarine had malfunctioned again. Nevertheless, with his partly disabled submarine he was still able to sail under the ice to prove it could be achieved.

After his Arctic submarine expedition, which many people considered a failure because he did not reach the North Pole, Wilkins organized three expeditions to the Antarctic to assist American millionaire explorer, Lincoln Ellsworth and become the first person to fly across the Antarctic continent. When Russian aviators went missing while flying from Russia to America via the North Pole, Wilkins was called in to head the search.

In 1938 he returned to Antarctic with [Lincoln Ellsworth](#), again assisting in the discovery of new land. At the outbreak of World War Two Wilkins immediately offered his services to the Australian Government, but it had no need for a polar explorer, now aged over 50. Wilkins next offered his service to the US Army which retained him to teach Arctic survival skill to US soldiers. After the war he remained a consultant to the US Army. The United States Navy were developing nuclear submarines for sub ice travel in the Arctic and consulted Wilkins on his pioneering 1931 expedition. Wilkins died on 30 November 1958 in a hotel room in Massachusetts. As a mark of respect the US Navy took his ashes to the North Pole in the nuclear submarine Skate. On 17 March 1959 the [Skate](#) became the first submarine to surface at the Pole, where it held a memorial service and scattered the ashes of Sir Hubert Wilkins.

There is a relatively unknown page in his biography - his trip to Soviet Russia in 1922 with a secret mission from the USA Government. Apparently, the mission didn't bear any intelligence character, and Wilkins had been requested to collect information about the conditions and efficiency of the famine relief efforts of the American non-Government organizations. Along with this kind of assessment Wilkins left interesting notes about the economical and political conditions in Russia during that hard time of transition from military communism to the New Economic Policy (NEP)

THE FRONTIER

The spirit of Soviet Russia is met on the Southern frontier as solid and clean cut as a wall. On one side - a few neatly uniformed Polish officials with bright buttons, cultured mustaches and military bearing, keenly alert on their duty, control menial staff of thin faced, less than average-sized individuals. Officials and men show that development of shrewd discernment born of competitive culture. They are ready at once to take advantage of the weaker intellect or a favorable opportunity, but they have understanding sufficient to acknowledge superior forces. On the other side, a company of round faced youth in a variety of red spattered greatcoats saunter back and forth or stand in groups gaping curiously at the train as it draws up at the station. No officer or anyone seems to be in authority and no one is conspicuous. With rifles slung or carried at the trail, and revolvers on their belts, the soldiers line the train on either side. Alternately, they cough and wipe their noses on their sleeves while they wait for passport officials to board the train. The train is short, but after a half hour's wait the passport official arrives at the middle carriage.

He is a red-cheeked boy of about 18 and small for his years. He has a ragged coat with sleeves turned back four inches, the other parts are large in the same proportion. (He had a brand new, blue-faced uniform when I returned some three weeks later). He was supported by another youth a year or so his senior, who could read Russian, but who evidently had difficulty in reading the Latin script. They collected the passports and carried them off leaving the passengers as to their fate. The train moved on and the soldiers jumped from the footbridge, half a dozen of them scrambling for the butt end of a cigarette improvidently discarded by an American traveler.

So the border is crossed but that does not necessarily mean that one can go on to Moscow. For twenty minutes the train stops at the Custom House at Niogoroloje. Here a crowd of scrubby hide-cloaked porters board the carriage. These are Government servants and are older than the soldiers. In their assorted woolly sheepskin coats and rough haired fez towering high above their stubbly faces, they look like the toughest band of bandits that one would have expected to meet in the Middle Ages.

Contrary to expectations, few Russians grow whole time beards; they grow them on the installment plan, fourteen days or so at a time. Once in the Custom House one meets with another type, Jews, Georgians and those with Teuton blood. Every bag is opened and three or four men gather round each bag and if anything unusual is discovered, they call their friends to view it. Food baskets are necessary, for there are no restaurant cars on the train and the food is mauled by the dirty hands of the Customs Officers. Packages such as dates or raisins are stirred with grimy fingers and parcels of sandwiches are opened, and their contents inspected.

Over any special paper is a general consultation: each man states his opinion as to the possible contents from its general appearance, and then it is laboriously read aloud by two or more officials in concert. If it provides sufficient amusement or is sufficiently indefinite, they hand it back and in some cases it is asked for again, so that those who have been too busy before may have a chance to see it. If the paper is neatly typed and its contents state briefly and concisely what it means, it is apparently looked on with grave suspicion; its direct precise language is the mark of the *Intelligenza*, and it is both in triumph from group to group and finally taken to an outside hut which is the office of the political control department. During the wait one may go and buy tickets and pay for baggage that has been registered. The baggage department was found in a third class railway truck, with a ticket window at the side, but no one stood at the window either in or outside. Everyone crowded through the door and clamoured round a greasy individual with hair and beard of equal length, some three weeks growth. Many hands, full of money and baggage tickets, backed by many languages, were thrust towards the booking clerk, for he booked seats as well as cashied for the baggage. They crowded him so close, that he could neither see, nor write.

With the side stroke of a swimmer, he waved the people back at intervals, and, writing fast, he talked and rattled the beads of his counter with his left hand, until checked again by the crowd.

No order prevailed. Here the idea of communism was that each one had an equal chance of thrusting the other aside and getting in first. A woman had been squeezed out three times, and when the clerk at last attempted to select her papers, they were thrust aside by a porter who then placed his baggage papers in the hands of the clerk. For twenty minutes or more the scene continued, before I had a chance to get my business done and leave them struggling.

Meanwhile in the Custom House, the baggage had been passed and taken to the train, but the man with the special papers had not returned. As the train was about to leave, my papers were brought back to me, but another special courier was left standing on the station as the express drew out. This meant a three days' wait or a journey to Moscow in the slow train on third class, hard board seats.

The journey to Moscow was uneventful except for the dripping of the tallow candle with which the car was lighted, on the feet of my traveling companion as he slept. Gas or electric light is rarely found on Russian trains.

IN MOSCOW

At the Moscow station there was a frenzied rush and struggle for the exit. Everyone pushed and battled for himself and each one received the same careful scrutiny and attention as he passed the gates. In the town itself, a few shops had lights burning brightly in the windows, and the goods most conspicuously displayed, were Xmas toys of German manufacture, garden flowers and sweets. Several food and clothing shops were large and well stocked, and there appeared to be no shortage of general supplies. The price of luxuries such as first class seats in places of amusements, late supper restaurants and high grade linen and clothes, were equivalent in English money to London prices. This means, of course, that these things are beyond the reach of the Russians with the exchange at 150 to 200 million roubles to the pound.

The maximum official salary paid by the Soviet Government at that time was 500 million roubles per month with certain allowances such as free housing, and food in some cases. Free living is not as a general rule given to the Government servants, and officials, whose wages range from 200 to 350 million a month without extras, must live on the simplest fare. A man with a wife and four children, for instance, can exist on 200 million roubles a month. Their fare is rye bread, a little fat, sugar, and an occasional meal of cheapest meat. Very few vegetables are obtainable at reasonable prices. White bread is about double the price of black bread, and is probably much less nourishing, but it is the desire of every individual to conspicuously show his wealth by buying white bread. Coal is not available, and wood for one fire for a month costs 20 million roubles. The better class foodstuffs seem to be plentiful in all the markets visited, but there is little sold. The peasants even with the help of the foreign missions, have to fall back on their supplies of edible grasses that are gathered during summer. Preserved in bulk, as they are, these grass have an appearance of ordinary hay. They are pounded in wooden troughs and mixed with rough rye flour for making bread.

Light physical, but otherwise trying vocations are very poorly paid. A chief clerk, for instance, in a Government Department gets ten million a month, a room and a rye bread, and a foreigner whom I know was offered a post as adviser to the chief of a political Department at a similar salary together with a room and living of the maximum luxury allowed to the Government officials; i.e., white bread, meat once a day, potatoes and vegetables. Yet even with this diet, a lean pinched face is seldom seen, for the Russian lower classes are a full faced rosy cheeked large-boned people.

Theatres, operas, cabarets and high class hotels are crowded mostly by foreigners from the bordering states, but the cheaper cafes are full of citizens. It is interesting to note that the word

"comrade" is no longer used by the Russians when addressing their friends. The word "citizen", or its equivalent, now takes its place.

Prices of theatre seats range from 5 to 35 million and vacant seats are rarely seen. In theatre bookings the apotheosis of Communism is found. Twenty or more ticket speculators sell tickets openly at the entrance of the Bolshoi Opera House during the day and immediately before the performance. Neither is the spirit of communism evident in the Government Departments; in fact, it is not in evidence at all in Russia. Each individual department, while thoroughly curious as to the wishes of an applicant for special permits, shoulders the responsibility of decision on to the next department and so on, until the accumulated notes of exchange are finally ambiguously OK'd and signed as inconspicuously as possible by one bolder than the rest.

Wearied by repeated presentations, the bearer carries the permit to the scene of action only to find that the final signee is not the immediate head of the Department concerned, and so his signature is worthless without further backing. Only by strict application and continued personal effort can one receive special permission to do anything or see anything, but that which is especially arranged, and one wonders if the ordinary British method of straightforward commonsense behavior would not allow one to pass unquestioned and unmolested in any part of Russia.

THE COUNTRYSIDE

From Moscow eastward on the Southern railway, the journey is through the lowland steppes that are dotted with fair sized forests in close proximity. East and west for 1000 miles, or, perhaps more, one is never out of sight of a village except in the few forest areas. Tall, slim spires above the gilded domes of churches spike the grey, snow horizon in almost every direction and this holds good even 100 miles from the central railway. With sufficient rain the land is fertile and while the people suffer now from the last year's drought, their grass crops are fairly plentiful. Numerous stacks of grass hay and many of better quality are seen in the heart of the famine area, and two things besides the drought conditions have brought about the present need. First the lack of horse power with which to gather harvest, and, second, the man power not economically applied is responsible for the loss of a great deal of grain that was left standing in the field. In many little supervised districts the peasants, fearful of the tax imposed on grain in kind, buried their half dried harvest underground and this is now a rotting mass and mildewed, useless for any purpose. With the obvious lack of Communistic principles amongst the peasants, the system of yearly land allotments and of different areas each year does not tend to get the best from any agricultural areas. It is true that land needs resting and the same land may not be cultivated each year, but peasants questioned in each case admitted that as they were not sure of getting the same plot of land from year to year for future working, they would not, therefore, tend it as thoroughly as they might. Simple and lovable for their cheerful, childlike disposition as they are, the peasants are not without that native cunning found equally in mankind and which is associated with cultured avarice in higher civilization. There is the evidence of so-called culture and development in its lower forms in the Government departments as conspicuously in Soviet Russia as in any other country of the world. A tip or a bribe is never refused and its even asked for by those with sufficient or insufficient education. One wonders if, by the time the bulk of the population have reached the stage of learning of the present official class, whether the officials will not have evolved to the same state of mind as those of pre-revolutionary days.

The Soviet educational policy as laid down seems sound, but so far it is known only to those who study official papers. On enquiry into a particular case, - an outlying district of thirty six villages, - on paper there were 27 schools, 18 controlled by high class teachers and assistants; others were second class teachers; attendance 3000 to 3500 children. On actual investigation there were found 8 buildings set aside for schools, 5 of them being occupied, and in three of these were first class teachers dealt with the few mixed scholars; the attendance for the district was less than 1000. As an average there was one book of instruction for every forty children. The explanation given at the Government district office was that they could not find educated people who would

teach in school at the outlying districts and they had no money for schools as yet. We asked from where they expected the money to come. From the export of grain in the future, was the reply. But there were millions of bushels of grain and thousands of tons of supplies that had to be taken to Russia last year by relief organizations in order to prevent the people from starving.

By what means will greater harvests be produced, - we asked, and it seems that they expect foreign small capitalists to come to Russia with manufacturing concern or agricultural machinery with which to help with the agricultural industry. These small concerns are allowed to exploit the country to the best advantage free of tax, but the Government retains 50% of the profits. Each concern must have at its head a Russian Government official and it is expected that in five years the Government will be in a position to dispense with the aid of foreign capitalists, and these small concerns will then be asked to leave Russia and their organizations will be taken over at a Government valuation.

So you must depend on the capitalists of other countries to help you, I said. Oh! Yes, was the reply, - we need the help of the capitalists in other countries, but we always intend to be communists in Russia.

Without a tremendous staff, relief organizations cannot supervise the supply of material to the actual individual, and the Government bodies acting as local famine relief committees do this work under the general supervision of the district relief worker. The relief worker has to depend to a certain extent on Soviet official reports, and they often find these very incorrect.

Applications for food for children's homes that do not exist, for instance, the cutting down of rations in the various homes, and the supplies so accumulated is the material, no doubt, that enables the Soviet Government to boast they are even now exporting grain to Poland. This statement is not generally believed to be true, but if there is any movement of grain from Russia, it is necessarily on a very small scale, and it does not in any way remove the need to continue feeding the Russian peasants for this winter at any rate, for without the help of the foreign missions, thousands would be starving. Considering the areas covered and the numbers concerned, a very small percentage of the supplies fail to reach the suffering. As a matter of fact, the statistics show that the greatest losses occur while the food is in transit and before reaching the Russian border where it is controlled by the careful, personal attention of the relief workers in the field. In the matter of business organizations one finds the relief committees equally, if not more, efficient than the average business house in other countries, and there is no doubt as to the sincerity of their efforts not only to relieve individual suffering but to enable an unfortunate people to recover from war, famine and exploitation.

The Soviet Government, while anxious for the work of the relief organizations to continue, take advantage of the work being done to gain support of the people, for instance, they put up posters in children's homes and other institutions that are maintained by the Relief organizations, stating that this is what is being done by the Government for the people, and they also encourage the peasants to believe the rumour, that the reason for high taxation is to pay the organizations for the present relief.

The peasants, whose previous experience does not lead them to expect anything for nothing, readily believe that some day they will have to pay.

One looks back as the train draws away from the borders of Russia, to the four square feet of blood-red rag that is like a tattered shirt-tail. It flutters and tugs at a thick, tall mast that would carry the sails of a full rigged ship. This straining emblem of Red Russia and the bulky pole are symbolic of Russia's condition today. The mighty tree, shorn of its limbs and roots, its vital organs, greedy and grasping though they might have been, cannot live by the aid of the fluttering blood-red flag that flies this way and that as the four winds blow. Even the trunk must rot and decay unless ... but it is not my province to foretell the future.

These notes are only to do with the present.

BUZULUK

Buzuluk County in the province of samara was once of the great wheat-growing centres of Russia, then came war, revolution, the Allied blockade and lastly - the three year famine.

The Friends International Service was one of the first relief Organizations to reach the famine area, and since the Fall drought, and the renewal of famine conditions, the Quakers have found it necessary to continue their work in Buzuluk county, and at the present time there are ten Quaker centers in the 54 volosts in this area.

Food supplies arrive several times a week along the Tashkent Railroad from London (en route two months) or from America (en route five months). This food is sealed in wagons, and inspected and unloaded by Mission workers upon its arrival at Buzuluk station. It is stored in warehouses at the station and distributed in monthly rations at the various centers - transported by sledge convoys drawn by camels, milch-cows or horses. These peasants haul the food for rations, receiving a double supply to render them fit for the hard journey over the steppes which often takes five days, according to distance and weather conditions. Monthly rations are distributed to over 200000 people, including adults and children, who would otherwise starve.

Mission members don vermin-proof uniforms, which are also fleece lined as a protection against the cold, before leaving for tours of inspection at the [Quaker](#) Centers. These uniforms are kept in boxes of naphthalene to prevent typhus infection.

At the villages, Mission workers weigh and distribute food to the Local Famine Committee. This Committee distributes monthly rations to the destitute peasants. These people prefer to receive their supplies at home; for many of them have not sufficient clothing to keep them warm, and are unable to attend the Mission kitchens, which have therefore to be closed in winter. The family receive rations for a month at a time, but there is not sufficient food to go round, and they have to fall back on the edible grasses in supplementing the rations. They have learned to chop the grass and mix it with flour for making bread.

Last August malaria was brought into Buzuluk district by the returning Tashkent refugees - it spread to almost every village and thousands died. The Mission has established a Clinic for the examination and treatment of these malaria cases, as well as other infections. There were no facilities for the treatment of patients in the Buzuluk hospital, and the Quakers equipped this Hospital Theatre.

The children have a clinic for examination and vaccination, and hundreds of post famine cases receive special diets in the Hospital kitchen, where they are fed from improvised tin cups made from milk cans. Many of them wear clothes made from sacking - nothing is wasted.

The Mission runs a Hospital of 100 beds for infectious diseases. Patients are brought here by the Mission car.

One of the greatest hardships in Russia today is the great shortage of live stock resulting from war and famine. The Quakers have imported 1000 horses from Turkestan, at an average cost of 3 pounds sterling. In some centers these horses are used for Mission work, hauling, ploughing etc. In this village there is but one horse to eighteen people, and the mission sells horses to the peasants on the instalment plan. In this way a peasant becomes the owner of a horse within a year and at the same time is self-supporting and not an object of charity, or pauperized by feeling that one can get something for nothing. The possession of a horse is all that is needed to establish a peasant family upon a sel-supporting basis, and it is the importing of horses that is felt to be the greatest need in reconstructing the agricultural life of the Russian peasants.

Both adults and children are required to work for their rations. Children sweep their school grounds of snow, or learn vocations and industrial trades. Adults who have no work, no longer spend the winter upon their stoves, but go to school for the first time in their lives. Women revive art embroideries and old flour sacking, or darn, knit socks, weave, spin etc. Whenever there is any work to be done, the Mission requires the peasants to work in return for food or clothes - but the great pity is that there is so little material with which to work, and no market wherein to sell in any real sense of the word; for few have money with which to buy the necessities of life - and in winter there is little the men can do. They mark the sides of the roads, which otherwise would be invisible in winter, they make *valinki* for the children's homes in return for rations - and thus, gradually home industries are being revived, and the work of reconstruction goes on.

There are 11000 children in the 26 homes in Buzuluk alone. Every center has many children's homes, which are supplied with food and clothes by the Quakers. The teachers and personnel of these homes also receive rations from the Quakers, for the people are too poor to give them food. Even in the schools, where the children are required to supply the teachers with food, the Quakers have to supplement the rations of the teachers in order that they may live. There is a great scarcity of books. In most schools there is but one school book for fifty children. The teachers help the children to learn organized games, and endeavour to give them the occupations, but the shortage of books renders it difficult to give the children regular instruction in the children's homes. These homes are composed of orphans from the war, and many are post-famine cases. As the winter progresses, those peasants who have not sufficient food to keep themselves and their families alive, journey to the towns, and desert the children in the hope that they will be cared for in the Children's homes. A child who gets into a Children's home is considered to be most fortunate. Members from the Mission in Buzuluk go to these Homes to entertain the children with music. The Friends supervise 130 homes.

The mission is also loaning horses to the peasants for house building, and for the hauling of grass for fuel. Last year the thatch roofs of many houses were used for fuel. This year there is a law against such house destruction; for it has necessitated the congestion of families into overcrowded houses, in the endeavour to keep warm. There are not sufficient horses to haul wood from the forests which are often great distances away from the villages. It is estimated that by next July there will be 250000 peasants in need, but if the crops are good, this will be the last year of relief work; for the goal is in sight and permanent results should be reached by the fall with the new harvest. This year the yield was only 25 percent in excess of the famine yield of last year, let us hope that next year will see the Russian peasant well on the way to agricultural prosperity.

The Russian Government cannot, through lack of resources, cope with the situation unaided. The starving peasants have been forced to kill or sell their horses and camels for food, and at least 20000 horses are needed to re-establish the ploughing industry, and good seed is needed to insure the crops. More tractors are needed to facilitate the ploughing, and the peasants are quick to respond and learn to run the tractors rapidly. They are eager and capable of helping themselves if they are given encouragement and outside help; for without the Quaker feeding, the famine conditions in Buzuluk County would return within the three weeks. We cannot let 200000 people starve, when carrying on a few months longer will insure their future.

THE AMERICAN RELIEF ORGANIZATION (ARA)

I saw very little of the working of the unit except at the headquarters of the supervisor of the Minsk District. At this place where the population is 87% Jewish, the staff is controlled by two American workers and about 20 Americanized Jews who returned from America during the revolution with the expectation of finding congenial conditions in the Soviet Russia. They now without exception heartily wish they had not returned and are using every means in their power to obtain permits to return to the USA. Many other local people are employed.

In the Minsk district the Organization deals mainly with the distribution of parcels forwarded by people in America to their friends in Russia. Under the 10 dollar food parcel scheme people hand 10 dollars to the ARA together with the address of a person in Russia and the ARA undertake to deliver a parcel of food that would cost in America 10 dollars minus the charges for purchase and delivery. At first the worth of food actually delivered to the individual in Russia, at the rate of exchange, was great deal more than 10 dollars, and in some districts food was practically unobtainable. The food parcel came to Russia in thousands and the other foreign Relief Organizations poured food into the country. Then the value of the food parcels decreased; now the same amount of foodstuffs contained in the 10 dollar parcel could be purchased in Russia from perhaps 4 dollars. This had led to a great deal of comment and throughout most of the districts visited one hears constantly of the "fraudulent practices of the ARA". The agitators bring this difference in values to the notice of the people and the people, not being able to understand the intricacies of modern finances any more than the educated people can in other countries, forget the late difference in values and readily believe what they are told from day to day. They consider only present conditions. They know that that food parcels distributed by the ARA are paid for in America and they cannot understand that any other organization such as the Society of Friends would actually distribute food without payment, if not beforehand, at some future date. Their experience in the past has not led to expect them something for nothing. They readily believe the Soviet officials who do their best to make them believe that it is the Government itself, and not the Relief Organizations, that is feeding them. The peasants believe the reason for the heavy taxation is in order to pay back the relief Organizations that are now supplying the food and hospital equipment. The belief is fostered in every way by the Government and even in buildings maintained by the relief Organizations posters are to be found announcing that "this institution is an example of what the Government is doing for its people".

The ARA is the only unit that has determinedly set out to combat these assertions and they exhibit counter posters announcing that their gifts are the donation of the American people. However, the judgement of the American officials and the strong feeling exhibited in Russia towards the distribution of food parcels purchased at a greater cost than the same amount than the same amount in local markets would cost has led the ARA to discontinue the collection of money for food parcels and they are now handling articles of clothing and whole cloths. At present the relative values are in favour of the purchase of these from America, but before long this phase of Relief work will assume the conditions now found in connection with foodstuffs. The private establishments and Government stores in Russia are beginning to import clothing material from other countries and the prices will soon come down.

The ARA depends to a very great extent on local help and Governmental reports, and in consequence they often find in their periodical inspections that false statistics are given. Many schools and children's houses, non-existent are included in ration lists and to many existing institutions the issue from local committees is short. The ARA apparently deal more severely with the cases of this kind than any other relief Organization and the week of my visit to Minsk no less than seven arrests of Government officials were made through the direct appeal of the ARA. Statistics show that the actual loss of material en route by rail to distributing centers is not very great and it is sugar and grain that the greatest losses occur. Precautions such as sealing trucks are resorted to but planks from floors or trucks are sometimes removed and foodstuffs in bulks are stolen. Owing to the fact that several relief Organizations are at work in the field and independent imports are to be found, it is difficult to trace the source from which foreign goods that are sold in public markets are obtained. The percentage of losses, however, is considered by the relief workers in charge as not exceptionally great.

The advantage taken by the Soviet Government to use the work of foreign relief Organizations as an example of what they themselves are able to do for the people is the most conspicuous feature to be noticed on a tour of inspection.

<http://www.sirhubert.com>

The Ohio State University Archives. Papers of Sir George Hubert Wilkins (RG 56.6), Box 13#18