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## The American YMCA and the Russian Revolution

In hope it began; in perplexity it ended. The twenty-three-year presence of the American Young Men's Christian Association in Russia that began in 1900 and reached a peak between 1917 and 1920, when more than 440 YMCA staffers served in that country and the Association spent almost eight million dollars for its operation, was over in 1923. In fact, the Association was required to curtail certain of its activities between 1917 and 1920 by both the conservative Kolchak movement in Siberia and the radical Bolshevik government, and eventually, like other groups, it was forced out. On October 5, 1923, the director of the YMCA in Vladivostok, Bracket Lewis, wrote, "The crash has come and we are all out of order in the office. Will write details of the closing of our work as soon as I can get to it."<sup>1</sup> The YMCA lasted longer than most foreign organizations in Russia after 1917, for it performed some valuable services in that revolution-torn land, but in the process it encountered the problems that troubled all the foreign humanitarian organizations, private or government-operated, that tried to act on a people-to-people basis during the Russian Revolution.

To understand YMCA activities during the Russian Revolution, and in fact to comprehend much of President Woodrow Wilson's Russian policy, one must realize that the president, the YMCA itself, and Americans in general believed that the Association and other such organizations could operate in a neutral fashion, aiding all Russian people, no matter what hap-

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1. Extract of a letter from Bracket Lewis, enclosed in telegram from G. C. Hanson, American consul at Harbin, to Secretary of State, Oct. 15, 1923, 861.144/2, microfilm roll 87, Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1910-29, available at the National Archives. According to a Soviet historian, S. Grigortsevich, "Iz istorii amerikanskoi agressii na russkom Dal'nem Vostoke, 1920-1922," *Voprosy istorii*, 1951, no. 8, pp. 59-79, the YMCA in 1922 was still sponsoring lectures, concerts, and movies and publishing a biweekly newspaper through its Russian branch, the "Maiak." But Grigortsevich claims that the YMCA also recruited spies, gathered intelligence, and preached the "superiority" of American democracy.

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The authors would like to express their gratitude to Dr. Paul B. Anderson for sharing his vast personal experience in the Russian activities of the American YMCA with us and to the staff of the YMCA Library in New York City for its help in assembling the YMCA's records on this subject for our research. They would also like to thank the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, where Eugene P. Trani was a fellow during the 1972-73 academic year, for help in the preparation of this article.

pened politically in that country.<sup>2</sup> The YMCA in Russia was Wilson's kind of operation, people-to-people, without official interference. The president would have preferred no involvement at all in Russian internal affairs in 1917-18. This having proved impossible, he decided to support and expand relief operations such as the activities the YMCA was performing, along with the Red Cross, the Stevens Railway Commission, and other organizations. John R. Mott, general secretary of the International Committee of the YMCA and a close friend of the president, was a leading candidate to head such a program. But events outraced the president, and Allied pressure, especially from Britain, brought American military involvement in the Civil War, and with it an end to the YMCA's neutrality in the Russian Civil War.<sup>3</sup>

2. There is a good deal of material on the YMCA and Russia. By far the most important source is the Russian material in the YMCA Historical Library in New York City, a large—more than twenty boxes—and mainly untouched source on the Russian Revolution. This rich collection will hereafter be cited as Russian YMCA Materials. A number of personal manuscript collections of former YMCA secretaries are in private hands. The authors examined the papers of the late Russell Story, through the courtesy of his wife, Gertrude, of Claremont, California, as well as those of surviving secretaries, Arthur Eugene Jenny of Medford, Oregon, and the Rev. William L. Tucker of Princeton, New Jersey. It should be noted that the Story Family Papers have recently been deposited in Hoover Institution Archives. We have also corresponded with other former secretaries and have received especially detailed information from Arthur P. Kempa of San Pedro, California, and Dr. Raymond J. Reitzel of San Mateo, California, who kindly sent us a copy of his autobiography, *All in a Lifetime* (Burlingame, Calif.: Advance Print Shop, 1969), which deals at length with Dr. Reitzel's long stay in both European Russia and Siberia. The authors also interviewed two men who had long connections with the YMCA's Russian activities, Donald Lowrie of Hightstown, New Jersey, and Dr. Paul Anderson of White Plains, New York. The interview with Dr. Anderson on September 9, 1971, lasted more than four hours and was most helpful for filling in details not available in the written records. There is also YMCA material in file 811.144, Young Men's Christian Association, Young Women's Christian Association, Salvation Army, in the State Department Records, 1910-29, Record Group 59, National Archives. Although this is a general file, about half the material has to do with YMCA operations in Russia between 1917 and 1920. A large portion of this material is made up of telegrams sent on State Department cables from YMCA secretaries in Russia to the New York Office. The Hoover Institution Archives in California has a number of collections with material on this subject. The most important are the Records of the American Red Cross, the Hugh Moran Papers, and the William Graves Papers. Two final sources that the authors examined are the Samuel Harper Papers at the University of Chicago and the John Mott Papers, deposited at the Yale Divinity School Library. Both have material on the YMCA in Russia. There are a number of YMCA-sponsored published sources on this topic, and they will be cited throughout this article. A general account of the wartime operation is Frederick Harris, ed., *Service with Fighting Men: An Account of the Work of the American Young Men's Christian Associations in the World War*, 2 vols. (New York: Association Press, 1924), which gives details of the size and cost of the Russian operation.

3. One of the authors, Eugene Trani, is currently at work on a study, "Woodrow Wilson and Russia, 1913-1921," and these conclusions come from his research in the primary materials available on this topic. There is, of course, a very large historiography.

American YMCA activities had begun in Russia in 1900, when Franklin Gaylord, an Association secretary, went to Russia after several years of difficult negotiations, and managed to launch YMCA programs "for young employees from the lower middle class" in both athletics and educational subjects. The biggest problem the YMCA encountered was that it was considered a "Protestant" organization interested in gaining converts in Orthodox Russia. The organization established in 1900 in Russia was not even called the YMCA; rather it was known as the Maiak, or Lighthouse. Its purpose was to encourage "positive Christian action in Russian life." The Maiak flourished in pre-World War St. Petersburg with the support of the American YMCA, especially the financial help of James Stokes, a New York businessman, and local Russians, such as Baron Paul Nicolay. It soon became an important educational center in that city, offering courses in German, French, English, arithmetic, physical education, typewriting, music, and other subjects. Priests of the Orthodox Church participated, thus allaying the fears that it would be a Protestant propaganda organization. As a result of visits to Russia by Mott, the Russian Student Christian Movement was begun. This organization, while also sponsored by the YMCA, was separate from the Maiak. The YMCA's presence in Russia between 1900 and 1914 was part of a larger expression of the Social Gospel doctrine that carried the YMCA into a broad international program in the last part of the nineteenth century. The American YMCA believed that personal spiritual salvation resulted from more than just prayer and education. Socially responsible action was equally important, and had benefits for both the members of the YMCA and the people aided by this action. The idea of social service in foreign countries grew naturally from such a conviction, and Russia had become an obvious target for American YMCA activity.<sup>4</sup>

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both Western and Soviet, on American participation in the Russian Civil War. This historiography will not be cited unless it is directly related to the efforts of the YMCA in Russia. The Soviets view the YMCA in Russia as part of the Allied effort to overthrow the Bolshevik government, and mention will be made of Soviet sources that cite the YMCA's activities. For mention of Mott's name to head a Russian relief program, see Edward M. House to Woodrow Wilson, June 4, 1918, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress. Mott's ideas for such a program are outlined in John Mott to Woodrow Wilson, July 24, 1918, Wilson Papers. William Appleman Williams treats the Red Cross in Russia in his *American-Russian Relations: 1781-1941* (reprint, New York: Octagon Books, 1971). A recent examination of the Stevens Commission is Jacqueline St. John, "John F. Stevens: American Assistance to Russian and Siberian Railroads, 1917-1922" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1969).

4. The best source for this early period of YMCA activity in Russia is Frank W. Ober, ed., *James Stokes: Pioneer of Young Men's Christian Associations* (New York: Association Press, 1921), which has a chapter by Franklin Gaylord, "Breaking into Russia." See also Kenneth S. Latourette, *World Service: A History of the Foreign Work and World Service of the Young Men's Christian Associations of the United States*

The World War changed all this. Educational activity declined, and the American YMCA found itself one of the main humanitarian organizations involved in prisoner-of-war work. The Association, operating under the auspices of the World Alliance YMCA of Geneva, aided Russian prisoners held by the Central Powers and, after some difficulty, gained access to camps of the German and Austro-Hungarian prisoners in Russia. To these camps it attempted to bring physical, intellectual, and emotional comfort. In addition to distributing supplies to prisoners, the Association set up educational and recreational activities which included libraries, classes, and facilities for physical education. From headquarters in Petrograd, the YMCA through its War Prisoners' Aid division, conducted activities in Kazan, Orenburg, Tashkent, Perm, Omsk, Tobolsk, Tomsk, Krasnoiarsk, Irkutsk, Chita, Khabarovsk, and elsewhere. Its work in these localities, as well as service to Russian prisoners in Germany and Austria-Hungary, made the organization well known, and developed in YMCA staffers a deep commitment to the long-suffering Russian people.<sup>5</sup>

The overthrow of Tsar Nicholas II in the March Revolution of 1917 and the entry of the United States into the war in April forced another shift in YMCA activities. The Association could no longer remain neutral, and turned over its prisoner-of-war efforts in Germany to other humanitarian organizations. In Russia the situation was more complicated. The World Alliance YMCA continued to do what it could for German and Austro-Hungarian prisoners. But the real stress of the American YMCA effort changed after April 1917 (especially after the visit of Mott as part of the Root Mission that summer) to service with the Russian army and to civilian work.

The American government encouraged this second change, particularly the assistance given the Russian army, because from the beginning of hostilities in April 1917 one of the goals of the Washington government had been to prevent the collapse of the Russian army, which would permit the Germans to move troops from the Eastern to the Western front. When Mott visited Petrograd in 1917 he indicated an interest in working with the Russian army. General Hugh L. Scott, chief of staff of the American army and a comember of the Root Mission, wrote the commander in chief of the Russian armies, General A. A. Brusilov, noting his years of experience with the YMCA and

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*and Canada* (New York: Association Press, 1957), esp. pp. 368–72. For an example of the American YMCA's work in another country during this period see Shirley S. Garrett, *Social Reformers in Urban China: The Chinese Y.M.C.A., 1895–1926* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970).

5. One of the best accounts of the work with the prisoners of war at a local level is Jerome Davis, *A Life Adventure for Peace: An Autobiography* (New York, 1967). See also Ethan T. Colton, *Forty Years with Russians* (New York: Association Press, 1940).

his desire to recommend them and their plan "unqualifiedly and strongly." Conferences with Russian Provisional Government leaders such as Prince Lvov and Kerensky led to a decision by Mott and other YMCA officials to "throw every available resource" into army work without delay, and YMCA secretaries were dispatched to the major garrison cities.<sup>6</sup> From the summer of 1917 to March 1918 many thousands of Russian soldiers became familiar with the YMCA. The organization's huts supplied meeting rooms, books, writing paper, and more intangible things like "friendship" and "encouragement," in an attempt to improve the morale of the troops.

These changing activities of the YMCA made relations with the Russian government far more important than in the past. The Provisional Government had staked its future, incorrectly as history was to show, on the necessity of pleasing the Allies by staying in the war. Although knowledgeable Russians doubted that the Association could really accomplish anything, the Provisional Government was willing to accept the American belief that the YMCA could aid the Russian military effort. It gave the YMCA a charter and guaranteed it free and unhindered transportation of both employees and goods on the railroads of Russia, promised speedy delivery of all letters written by soldiers under YMCA auspices, exempted from customs all goods imported by the Association, supplied personnel to support YMCA activities, and pledged the use of public buildings.<sup>7</sup> YMCA activities became particularly important in Moscow, Odessa, Kiev, and Minsk, in addition to Petrograd.

6. Scott to Brusilov, July 9, 1917, box 5, X673, Russian YMCA Materials. Mott's hopes for the Russian operations are indicated in John Mott, "The Opportunity of the Hour in Russia and Other Countries of Europe," Oct. 11, 1917, speech given at the Boston City Club, *Addresses and Papers of John R. Mott*, 6 vols. (New York: Association Press, 1946-47), 4:758-77, and also *Recent Experiences and Impressions in Russia: Extracts from Correspondence and Addresses of John R. Mott, Member of the Special Diplomatic Mission of the United States to Russia, May-August, 1917* (New York: International Committee, 1917). Mott wrote in reporting his conversation with Brusilov, "Pending our return to Washington and the securing of action on the part of our Government, I have diverted from the Prison Camp Work as many American secretaries as possible." Mott's conclusions were that "the need cannot be exaggerated; that the doors are wide open; that the Association is the only agency at hand qualified to deal adequately with the situation." See "Report of Mr. Mott," ca. August 1917, box 192, Elihu Root Papers, Library of Congress. A recent study of the Root Mission is Alton E. Ingram, "The Root Mission to Russia, 1917" (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 1970). For Soviet attitudes to Mott's role in the Root Mission, see A. Gulyga, "Nachal'nyi period antisovetskoi interventsii SShA, 1917-1918 gg.," *Voprosy istorii*, 1950, no. 3, pp. 3-25. Mott is characterized as the Mission's leading ideologist who laid the groundwork for pro-American propaganda. A. E. Ioffe, in "Missiia Ruta v Rossii v 1917 godu," *Voprosy istorii*, 1958, no. 9, pp. 87-100, calls Mott the leader of the reactionary YMCA and also portrays him as a close personal friend and unofficial adviser of Wilson, whom, of course, the Soviets blame for intervention in the Russian Civil War.

7. Jerome Davis to Mott, Nov. 4, 1917, Records of Russia and Siberia, 1918-20,

It was clear to Mott that the less than fifty YMCA secretaries would have little effect upon an institution as large as the Russian army. As soon as he returned to the United States he began a major recruitment of secretaries for service in Russia. Recruiters went all over the country, especially to college campuses where the YMCA was a powerful organization. Those who visited college campuses were reminded that "apart from the patriotic service to be rendered by such men the argument might well be presented to the college that there is no field in which a man who is interested in the application of the latest results of sociology and economics in that of [*sic*] applied Christianity can be put into effect as in Russia." Students, teachers, and recent graduates were welcome. The recruitment drive meant that many nonpermanent YMCA staffers would now become part of this large operation.<sup>8</sup> Some volunteers saw an alternative to service in the armed forces; others could not qualify for the army or navy and yet wanted to serve their country; still others were convinced of the importance of the opportunity to serve in Russia. The personnel of the YMCA in Russia, and for that matter the Association in general, was of a very high quality. Whether permanent YMCA staffers or wartime volunteers, these men were in many ways the "best of their generation," much like the Peace Corps personnel of a later time. The phrase "applied Christianity," cited by the recruiters, was of special significance, for though the role of the YMCA was changing, its goals were the same. As in the pre-1914 period, the object of the YMCA in Russia remained an expression of the Social Gospel, but its application was shifted from the field of education to that of service and humanitarianism for the participants in the World War.

As the new recruits went racing toward their rendezvous with history, YMCA officials in Russia busily made plans for the future. Jerome Davis, one of the leaders of the YMCA work in Russia and a future Yale theologian, wrote Mott in early November 1917, emphasizing the critical need for more personnel and hoping that the American contingent could eventually be built up to more than eight hundred, with a budget of more than three million dollars a year.<sup>9</sup> "I believe," he said, "that every American sent to Russia

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E. T. Colton Collection, Russian YMCA Materials. G. K. Seleznev, in *Krakh zagovora* (Moscow, 1963), notes that the Provisional Government granted enormous privileges to the YMCA. Such concessions, Seleznev maintains, amounted to the beginning of American economic penetration and a sellout to American imperialists by the Kerensky government.

8. William Orr, "Memorandum of College Men for Service in Russia," Aug. 22, 1917, box 7, Russian YMCA Materials; and Mott to Samuel Harper, Oct. 5, 1917, box 4, Harper Papers, University of Chicago.

9. Davis to Mott, Nov. 4, 1917, Records of Russia and Siberia, 1918–20, Colton Collection, Russian YMCA Materials. Soviet sources, obviously inflated, set the size of the YMCA mission at fifty entering Vladivostok in early October 1917, with an additional

now is worth one hundred sent to France. Surely every week the Russian line holds will be of inestimable value." He saw the purpose of the YMCA as being "to serve Russia, her government, with all the power of our command." If through deeds the Association could demonstrate the spirit of Jesus Christ, it would be of great aid to Russia, its soldiers, and the world. Specifically this meant service to the Russian armed forces by the supplying of schools, libraries, baths, barber shops, dentists, and many other things. In addition, the YMCA should work in Russian cities, and do what it could for the bulk of the Russian population living in the countryside.

The problem with all of these elaborate plans, which met with hearty approval back in the United States both within the YMCA and in Washington, was that the Russian situation was in a great state of flux. Several hundred new secretaries were being recruited. But it was, of course, apparent to the new arrivals that the Association had many problems—some of its own making. Though work, first among the prisoners of war and then the Russian army, had been under way for several years, there was no central authority. "Instead of coming into a prepared situation and having a niche in which to fit," one prominent secretary complained, "we find no preparation to speak of, little or no organization." Part of the difficulty was that the senior YMCA secretary for Russia, A. C. Harte, who had headed the War Prisoners' Aid and then took over the Russian Army work, was then in Europe, and activities in Russia were under control of two young secretaries, Davis and Crawford Wheeler, who planned to send men to the front without developing a central administration. The secretaries met in Moscow on November 8, 1917, and created a temporary War Work Council, a self-constituted cabinet whose purpose was to direct and coordinate YMCA activities. Davis continued largely in control, and many of the secretaries rightly remained critical of his leadership. Russell M. Story, a volunteer YMCA secretary on leave from teaching duties at the University of Illinois and who later became president of the Claremont Colleges, believed that Davis lacked executive ability, failed to inspire confidence, and demonstrated reckless judgment. Only enthusiasm worked in his favor, and so "confusion, misunderstanding, and divided counsels ran rife."<sup>10</sup> With no com-

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five hundred arriving there in late October. They also say that the funding for this operation was part of "counterrevolutionary" activities of the Western Allies. See G. K. Seleznev, "Ekspansii amerikanskogo imperializma v Rossii v 1917 godu," *Voprosy istorii*, 1954, no. 3, pp. 55–73, and Ioffe, "Missiia Ruta v Rossii v 1917 godu," pp. 97–98.

10. Story to Mrs. Story, Nov. 8 and 9, and Dec. 9, 1917, Story Family Papers; "Report of R. M. Story on Y.M.C.A. Work in Russia and Siberia," Mar. 9, 1919, box 5, X947, Colton Collection, and E. T. Colton, "Russell M. Story," undated memorandum, box 7, both in Russian YMCA Materials. Story and his fellow secretaries in Russia were not alone in criticizing Davis. Secretary of State Robert Lansing sharply reprimanded Davis for meddling in political and diplomatic affairs in Russia, one of the few YMCA secretaries so criticized by the United States government. See Lansing to Mott,

munication between the headquarters in New York and the Russian workers, the secretaries were left largely on their own.

Then there was the very nature of the proposed work, which raised its own problems. As E. T. Colton, eventually to head the YMCA's Russian operation, later wrote, "Scores of men had been sent across seas to employ a technique calculated to help sustain morale in a beaten army, to keep it fighting for the common allied cause. They began operations just in time to see that army dissolve before their eyes, abetted and aided by the new government set to make peace with the enemy powers."<sup>11</sup> With the Bolshevik takeover in November 1917, some secretaries saw that, as one of them remarked, the time for the YMCA aiding the military efficiency of the Russian army was "probably past." As a matter of fact, Story noted that the new Bolshevik leaders "frankly affirm that because the work makes the soldiers more contented and therefore more willing to stay at the front it prolongs the war and that the secretaries and the work must go."<sup>12</sup> Secretaries who had come to Russia to further the war would have to leave and go to the Western front.

Even so, the YMCA, along with the American Red Cross, an organization whose principal activity was the distribution of supplies, hoped to stay. The American consul in Moscow, Maddin Summers, urged the Association to remain, noting that the Russian people deserved moral and material support. Summers hoped that future work would "embrace as great an activity as possible amongst the working and soldier class."<sup>13</sup> The YMCA secretaries met to determine the Association's future in Russia, and they decided to stay. They planned to stress work with the Russian people, in effect ignoring the Soviet government and the tremendous changes then taking place. Some secretaries even hoped they could counteract the breakdown of morale in the Russian army. By remaining neutral—so they thought—they could help the misery that resulted from the war and the revolution. At their meeting the temporary War Work Council was converted into a permanent institution, and secretaries were assigned different tasks. In mid-December 1917 the Association established contact with the cultural and educational departments of the new Petrograd government, and talked to American Ambassador David R. Francis and the Red Cross official, Raymond Robins, as part of an effort to "secure authority and cooperation" for its work. Many secretaries came to believe

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Dec. 7, 1917, 763.72119/987, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918, Russia*, 3 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1931–32), 1:289–90.

11. Colton, "Russell M. Story," undated memorandum, box 7, Russian YMCA Materials.

12. Story to Mrs. Story, Nov. 27 and Dec. 4, 1917, Story Family Papers.

13. Summers to YMCA, Dec. 9, 1917, Records of Russia and Siberia, 1918–20, Colton Collection, Russian YMCA Materials.

that the Soviet government approved the privileges granted by the Kerensky government.<sup>14</sup>

All of this amounted to backing and filling, as the YMCA sent its men out to remain "neutral" in a civil war that was just beginning. There was something incongruous, almost ridiculous, about these men trying to express the Christian doctrine of serving human need to a society racked by unprecedented turmoil. A few of them realized what they were getting into. Story, the educational secretary of the War Work Council, came to see that it was out of place to arrange for the distribution of a translation of "The Social Principles of Jesus" and other such works in what he recognized as a major social revolution. By January 1918 he was writing, "It sometimes seems to me that having come so far to help Russia we have to face the fact that Russia is in no position today to receive help. The country does not know what it wants and it is a fair assumption that it does not want us—in fact we are pretty much in the way at present."<sup>15</sup>

For the most part the secretaries, extraordinarily able men in their idealistic ways, could not look beyond their activities of the moment. They, like diplomats in Russia, did not see the reality of Russia as it was at the outset of the Civil War, with the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks and a new way of life for the millions of persons who were on the way to becoming Soviet citizens. Few of the secretaries ever really came to understand why the Bolsheviks did not welcome their efforts. The secretaries knew little of Marxist theory and philosophy and, though they had been told many times, did not believe that nothing would be acceptable in Bolshevik Russia unless it originated in Communist theory. Furthermore, the YMCA secretaries were generally uninformed about the great diversity of nationalities and ethnic groups in Russia and were frequently caught up in the excitement of events.

Thus the months between the Bolshevik takeover and the spring of 1918 were very discouraging for Association staffers in Russia. One report noted, "The Association struggles on." Secretaries in the field did what they could to aid the soldiers, both those who stayed at the fronts fighting the Germans and those who were, by this time, leaving in large numbers. YMCA huts therefore sprang up both at the front and along the railroads used by the self-demobilizing soldiers. The Association also cooperated with the Committee on Public Information in distributing President Wilson's statements to the

14. See David Francis's Appointment Book for 1917, David R. Francis Papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis; Story to Mrs. Story, Nov. 27, Dec. 16 and 30, 1917, and Jan. 18, 1918, Story Family Papers; and "Report of R. M. Story on Y.M.C.A. Work in Russia and Siberia," Mar. 9, 1919, box 5, X947, Colton Collection, Russian YMCA Materials.

15. Story to Mrs. Story, Jan. 18, 1918, Story Family Papers.

Russian people, aided in the returning of Russian and German prisoners of war, and continued its civil work in the cities.<sup>16</sup>

The New York office in late 1917 appointed a new senior secretary for Russia, E. T. Colton. But the war on the Russian front was rapidly coming to a close, first with an armistice between Germany and Russia and then the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918. Colton arrived in Russia in late February and quickly realized that the New York office had not been kept informed of changing conditions in Russia. It was soon obvious that the YMCA movement “has not found itself.” Efforts of the Association to help hold the army together, to improve conditions at the front, and to make the soldiers more contented could not succeed and could cause trouble. Educational work was “indifferently received.” Results of the work seemed “entirely disproportionate to the men and money used.” Fully a third of the monthly expenditures went into overhead—salaries, living expenses, upkeep of headquarters. This had to change. Further problems resulted from the limited finances for Russian YMCA work, gained through contributions and American government subsidies, and from the difficulty, given the turmoil, of even using the funds available. Colton saw that Bolshevism was much more widespread than the “common newspaper reports” showed. And “wherever and so long as the Bolsheviks are in power, service to the army is frowned upon and blocked.” At least in Soviet Russia, army activities were at an end. There might be some of the usual Association work in a few large centers, though “the Bolshevik leaders would not give it any encouragement because it is Christian in character—and their spirit is openly anti-religious.” The Bolsheviks considered the Association “an institution belonging to capitalistic society and supported by the money of that class.” Another possibility was relief work. The final alternative was to remove the whole YMCA contingent from Russia, especially if American government officials left Russia.<sup>17</sup>

16. Crawford Wheeler to Mott and Colton, Nov. 22, 1919, “Report on War Time Activities in Russia,” E. T. Colton, *Siberia, World War I Field Reports, Russian YMCA Materials*. The YMCA’s effort to distribute Wilson’s statements to the Russian people was reported by George Creel, head of the Committee on Public Information, to the president. See Creel to Wilson, Jan. 15, 1918, *Wilson Papers*. Soviet scholars continually discuss the fact that the YMCA aided the American government and see the distribution of Wilson’s Fourteen Points speech as a perfect example of this sort of activity. See Gulyga, “Nachal’nyi period,” p. 21. These contentions are made despite the fact that apparently the YMCA’s distribution to Russian and German troops on the Eastern front of two million copies of Wilson’s speech was made with Bolshevik assistance. See Louis Fischer, *The Soviets in World Affairs: A History of the Relations Between the Soviet Union and the Rest of the World, 1917–1929*, 2 vols. (London, 1930), 1:42.

17. Colton to Mott, Jan. 27, 1918, *Records of Russia and Siberia, 1918–20*, Colton Collection, *Russian YMCA Materials*. For a discussion of the need for more governmental support of the YMCA see Mott to Creel, Feb. 8, 1918, enclosed in Creel to Wilson, Feb. 27, 1918, *Wilson Papers*.

The situation steadily grew worse for the Association; it was attacked on all sides. From the outset the Soviet government had shown great doubts about the YMCA's proposed neutrality. The Bolsheviks were willing to accept whatever material aid the YMCA could give them, and they encouraged the Association to contribute bread and other foodstuffs to hospitals for Russian soldiers repatriated from prisoner-of-war camps in the Central Powers. But they would not condone propaganda or meddling in internal Russian affairs. As for opponents of the Soviet government, they viewed material aid as an expression of pro-Bolshevik sympathies—and began to attack the YMCA. The Germans added to the criticism, especially before Brest-Litovsk, when the Association was seen as an organization supporting continued Russian resistance to Germany. From all sides the local secretaries were besieged; it is no wonder that Jerome Davis in early February 1918 telegraphed Mott that army work was over and asked about the future. Was it possible to get secretaries transferred to France and the Western front? Mott replied by telegram: "Highest authorities our government [no doubt referring to his friend President Wilson] attach no less importance work for Russian people than for Russian army. I hope our secretaries may grasp the significance of the present wonderful opportunity to serve Russia."<sup>18</sup>

The Samara conference of YMCA officials, held in that city on the Volga in the latter part of March 1918, proved decisive for the Russian YMCA operation. The reason for the conference was "to establish morale in the restless, distraught aggregation of YMCA personnel."<sup>19</sup> Colton wanted a consensus on what the Association should do, and seventy-three secretaries met—a sizable attendance considering transportation problems at that time. Colton came with cables from New York, including Mott's assurance that President Wilson had urged the YMCA to continue its work to demonstrate America's interest in the Russian people. With statements from Mott to both Colton and Davis about the need to stay in Russia, one alternative was largely removed from the Samara discussions. The YMCA would stay.

The question to be decided was what form its work should take. The conference heard reports on the different phases of YMCA work, some of them covering geographical areas. Colton desired each man to state whether he wanted to remain. Eleven felt they had to leave for military service, and

18. Davis to Mott, telegram, Feb. 9, 1918, and Mott to Davis, telegram, received Feb. 10, 1918, Records of Russia and Siberia, 1918–20, Colton Collection, Russian YMCA Materials. At one point, John Mott enlisted the support of the American socialist Charles Edward Russell in the hope that activities supported by American socialists would be more acceptable in revolutionary Russia. See, for example, Mott to Russell, Mar. 18, 1918, book 9, Charles E. Russell Papers, Library of Congress.

19. E. T. Colton, "With the Y.M.C.A. in Revolutionary Russia," *Russian Review*, 14 (April 1955): 128–39.

six others alleged personal reasons for departing, but the remaining fifty-six present decided to stay, expressing their preferences for various kinds of work.

With the conference dominated by the "stay in Russia" sympathy, it did not bring much insight to the difficulties of working in a revolutionary situation in which it was often necessary to deal simultaneously with several factions contending for power. Traditional YMCA services were thought to be sufficient for this very untraditional situation. These sentiments were best expressed by Colton in a report to Mott, in which he mentioned that the Association should stay until national policies brought hostility toward America into the minds of the Russian people. "At present the reverse is true," he wrote, "apart from the uncompromising bitter Internationalists . . . , and even their opposition is not directed against us personally but rather against our organization, which they say is wrapped up with capitalistic society."<sup>20</sup>

Colton and the rest of the secretaries decided to concentrate on four kinds of activities. Some would study Russian "with a view to future work." Some would develop permanent YMCA work in Russian cities. Others would provide emergency relief. The rest would serve their country and the Western allies in any way possible. Such plans certainly revealed the ignorance of Colton and the other secretaries of the true nature of Bolshevism, for the plans worked at cross purposes and guaranteed Bolshevik irritation with the Association. A tentative program was laid out, and the secretaries dispersed to Moscow, Petrograd, Kazan, Murmansk, Archangel, Vladivostok, and elsewhere.

Mott approved these decisions, writing Colton from London in April that he had been to Washington before he had left the United States and had conversations with many government officials. All supported the plan to keep the Association in Russia. Most important of all, he noted:

I had an unhurried interview with the President and asked him whether he would advise us to call out the men whom we had sent to Russia, now that it was apparent that they could not do the kind of work for which we sent them, but rather would have to devote themselves largely to work for men wherever men might be found. He agreed with me absolutely and emphatically that we should not call out our representatives, save the

20. Colton to Mott, Mar. 21, 1918, Russia, 1918 box, Russian YMCA Materials. Discussions of the Samara conference are in Colton, "With the Y.M.C.A. in Revolutionary Russia," p. 133; Reitzel, *All in a Lifetime*, pp. 193-99; and "Report of R. M. Story on Y.M.C.A. Work in Russia and Siberia," Mar. 9, 1919, box 5, X947, Colton Collection, Russian YMCA Materials. See also "Report of Minsk District Given at the Samara Conference," Mar. 20, 1918, and Donald Lowrie, "Statement Regarding Work in Odessa District, Presented at the Samara Conference," Mar. 20, 1918, box X947, Russia, Minsk, Russian YMCA Materials.

comparatively few who were subject to the draft when they left America. . . . He recognized the great desirability of our country being in evidence among the Russian people in such a fruitful and unselfish ministry. He agreed with me as to the wisdom of our men not participating in politics, but devoting themselves exclusively and impartially to serving the men of all classes and parties.

For Wilson, for Mott, for Colton, indeed for the secretaries who decided to remain, the YMCA work could give the Russian people "unmistakable evidence that America has not forgotten or deserted them."<sup>21</sup> The president felt so strongly about this kind of work that later, in the summer of 1918, he had Secretary of War Newton Baker advise Mott that YMCA secretaries serving in Russia and eligible for the draft should stay with the Association. The War Department, through the adjutant general, would work out details with local draft boards.<sup>22</sup>

So the YMCA work continued. There were many sides of it, and it occurred in different circumstances and in territory under the control of different governments. Volunteers continued to arrive. Work went on in the areas controlled by the Bolsheviks, sometimes with Bolshevik collaboration. There was joint relief work with the Red Cross among the Russian prisoners returning from Germany. Civil programs operated in various cities, even in Moscow, by this time the Bolshevik capital, and a good deal of service was rendered to railroad employees. There was a cooperative agricultural exhibit, aided by funds from local soviets, on the Volga River. A large steamer with four rural specialists of the YMCA and thirty-one Russian helpers visited villages and towns for hundreds of miles along the river, giving practical demonstrations to Russian peasants on aspects of animal husbandry, bee-keeping, horticulture, food preservation, sanitation, and care of children. In fact, the YMCA had pamphlets printed on some of these subjects, especially as part of its civil service in Siberia. This sort of program had a much better chance of success, and the YMCA began to shift more and more to such activities. "The Social Principles of Jesus" was replaced on the YMCA list

21. Mott to Colton, Apr. 9, 1918, box 7, Russian YMCA Materials. Mott was, of course, never a sympathizer of the Bolsheviks and probably never really understood Bolshevism. He was a strong believer in the March Revolution and a supporter of the moderates who ruled Russia between March and November 1917. He also remained in close contact with the Russian ambassador in Washington, Boris Bakhmeteff. His belief that the secretaries should remain in Russia is thus easily understood. For an analysis of Mott see George F. Kennan, *The Decision to Intervene* (Princeton, 1958), pp. 325–26.

22. Baker to Mott, Aug. 9, 1918, box X947, Siberia: POWs, Russian YMCA Materials. The president told Baker, "This matter which Mott alludes to here seems to be important, and I would be very much obliged if you would be kind enough to have it straightened out and these young gentlemen reassured." See Wilson to Baker, July 22, 1918, and Baker to Wilson, Aug. 8, 1918, Wilson Papers.

of publications by "Poultry on the Farm," "First Lessons on Animal Husbandry," "Soil and Soil Management," and "Feeding for Milk Production." But though the YMCA changed its activities to more technical aspects of humanitarian service, the ultimate goal remained that of Christian service to the Russian people no matter what happened politically in that country. The Association therefore did what it could in Soviet Russia to remain neutral, at one point even incurring the wrath of the Committee of Public Information by telling Edgar Sisson, in charge of the Committee's work in Russia, that Association secretaries were not at his disposal. While the YMCA earlier could distribute propaganda to the soldiers of the Russian army, Colton saw that it was not possible after early 1918, though secretaries did at times carry communications for American officials in Russia.<sup>23</sup>

Relations with the Bolshevik government grew increasingly worse, and in August 1918 the American consul in Moscow, DeWitt Clinton Poole, advised that "all measures should be taken to evacuate from Central Russia the American personnel of the Young Men's Christian Association."<sup>24</sup> The YMCA did not follow this advice completely, and several secretaries tried to continue. In October the Association finally received word from the Soviet government that it was "considered a decidedly harmful organization."<sup>25</sup> All types of work by the Association were to be stopped, its property confiscated, and the secretaries sent abroad or to concentration camps. Political neutrality in Soviet Russia had proved impossible.

What prompted this move by the Bolsheviks? Part of the problem was that Russians who opposed the Bolshevik government and yet were in its territory had looked to the YMCA for possible assistance. Professors, lawyers, physicians, church leaders, and other professionals sought advice from Association secretaries. Though the YMCA continued to aid people of all political persuasions, the Bolshevik government viewed any organization in contact with people who did not support its policies with deep suspicion. A further difficulty arose from the nature of the YMCA. The secretaries were generally disturbed by the antireligious pronouncements of the new government, and though they tried to remain politically neutral, many of them were philosophically hostile to the Bolsheviks and believed the Russian people would repudiate Bolshevism once they came to understand it. While some, though not many, were sympathetic to the new government, the majority waited for its over-

23. The agricultural pamphlets, in Russian, are found in the Russian YMCA Materials.

24. Poole to YMCA, Aug. 22, 1918, box 7, Russian YMCA Materials.

25. "All Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combatting Counter-revolution, Speculation and Crimes when Employed" to the YMCA, Oct. 25, 1918, E. T. Colton, World War I Field Reports, Russian YMCA Materials.

throw.<sup>26</sup> The Bolsheviks were aware of their sentiments. Another difficulty was that the American YMCA was, as far as the Bolsheviks were concerned, an instrument of the United States government. As relations between Moscow and Washington grew more troublesome, the position of the YMCA in Bolshevik Russia necessarily became weaker.

Association secretaries, some of whom had left Bolshevik Russia and others who were recent arrivals in Russia, were assigned to many different locations. There were secretaries on the Persian border, in Rumania, in North Russia, and especially in Siberia.<sup>27</sup> All of them seemed to be aiding forces opposing Bolshevik control. In Archangel, secretaries were working with the Allied forces there. A. M. Craig was able to report to the New York office in late August 1918 that he had opened the first YMCA club for Allied forces, with another to open soon. He was making plans for work among Russian citizens, and asked for personnel. That the American officials approved his efforts appeared in dramatic fashion. Ambassador Francis, by this time in Archangel, added a handwritten postscript for Mott on Craig's report: "I have read above & heartily concur as cabled Dept. today to tell you." Later, in January 1919, Crawford Wheeler reported that the YMCA was "represented at practically every point where troops are stationed in this region." The YMCA outfitted railroad cars, turning them into portable canteens. The Association was busy at Murmansk, and in fact for several months a YMCA secretary informally took over United States consular duties in that city. As the year 1918 came to an end the YMCA had moved, at least in North Russia, from neutrality to serving the Allied forces that had intervened in the raging civil war. Several secretaries were eventually taken prisoner by the Bolsheviks.<sup>28</sup> It was natural that the American YMCA would aid American troops in North Russia. It was also natural that the organization would be viewed with hostility by the Bolsheviks, no matter what assistance it was giving within Soviet Russia.

Involvement with Allied plans was even greater in Siberia, which was to prove the last stand of the YMCA in Russia. The large American YMCA involvement in Siberia had begun with assistance to the Czech Legion, soldiers who had refused to fight for Germany and Austria-Hungary and had gone over to Russia. First contacts between the YMCA and the Czechs occurred in late

26. Jerome Davis, for example, was more sympathetic to the Bolsheviks than most of the YMCA secretaries. But he was more the exception than the rule.

27. For a summary of these activities see Wheeler to Mott and Colton, Nov. 22, 1919, "Report on War Time Activities in Russia," E. T. Colton, Siberia, World War I Field Reports, Russian YMCA Materials.

28. Craig to C. V. Hibbard, Aug. 30, 1918, YMCA, Russia, North Russia Occupation box, and Wheeler to Colton, Jan. 11, 1919, box 146-B, World Service, both in Russian YMCA Materials. See also Kennan, *Decision to Intervene*, p. 255.

1917, with dispatch of two secretaries to work with them near Kiev. As the Russian front collapsed and the Czechs decided to move eastward, the Association assigned a secretary to each train moving Czechs on the Trans-Siberian railroad toward Vladivostok. At the Samara conference the secretaries had decided on this assistance for the Czechs, though it was only one part of a general program for Siberian activities. The Association hoped to continue the World Alliance YMCA's assistance to German and Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war, establish YMCAs in major cities of Siberia, and aid the railroad workers. Initially, it was able to maintain neutrality between the Czechs and the Bolsheviks. Story, who appeared in Vladivostok by late April 1918 as supervisor of YMCA work in Eastern Siberia, established relations with the local Soviet and continued the assistance to the Czechs agreed on at Samara.<sup>29</sup>

The tension between the Czechs and the Bolsheviks broke out into the open on June 29, 1918, and for the YMCA neutrality became impossible. The Association decided to continue support of the Czechs, now at war with the Soviet government. The decision to continue assistance was no doubt partly a result of Allied support for the Czechs. Soon it had opened ten barracks clubs for the Czechs around Vladivostok alone, as well as many

29. "Report of R. M. Story on Y.M.C.A. Work in Russia and Siberia," Mar. 9, 1919, box 5, X947, Colton Collection, Russian YMCA Materials. It should be noted that YMCA secretaries disputed the reports by opponents of the Soviet government that the Bolsheviks were arming the German and Austro-Hungarian prisoners in Siberia, a reason frequently cited by those calling for Allied intervention in Russia during 1918. Story, for example, wrote that there was "much exaggeration" in these reports. See Story to Mrs. Story, Apr. 20, 1918, Story Family Papers. A recent work by the Soviet scholar V. L. Soskin, *Ocherki istorii kul'tury Sibiri v gody Revoliutsii i Grazhdanskoii voiny, konets 1917–nachalo 1921 gg.* (Novosibirsk, 1965), summarizes YMCA activities in Siberia in the following way. There was a close connection between the YMCA, the American government, and leading financiers of imperialism. Soskin points out that even the Kolchak government felt threatened by this and therefore eventually tried to eliminate the YMCA. Soskin shows that the Rockefellers contributed funds for YMCA activities in Russia. For Soskin the true aim of the YMCA was to create its own Russian agency and thus force Russia to submit to the "imperialist monopolists" that stood as the "backbone" of the YMCA. The YMCA, as the most powerful ideological agency in Siberia, also tried to subvert the ignorant peasantry with religious propaganda. Thus the YMCA, for Soskin, becomes the chief ideological arm of American expansion and part of a plan to force a foreign religion on unsuspecting peasants. Soskin notes that the YMCA was highly successful among young intellectuals, though not with the peasantry. A. I. Geronimus, in "Pomoshch' Soedinennykh shtatov Ameriki Kolchaku," *Istoricheskie zapiski*, 29 (1949): 33–47, states that the YMCA was energetic in its instructional work in the counterrevolutionary and interventionist armies and among the population. The YMCA used mass media with great skill in propagandizing the American way of life, but, Geronimus notes, the population did not put its faith in these representatives of the "democratic" republic that sided with one of the most "brutal leaders of the White Guards" (p. 45).

rolling canteens (converted railroad cars).<sup>30</sup> The budget for canteen services to the Czechs alone jumped from 12,000 rubles in June 1918 to 2,000,000 rubles by October. At one point the YMCA provided the following supplies to the Czechs on a weekly basis: 10,000 loaves of bread, two tons of chocolate, ten tons of biscuits, and a million cigarettes. The Allied decision to send troops to Vladivostok followed shortly, and the YMCA became more involved in the struggle against the Bolsheviks.

Soon the Association was caught up in the excitement of conflict, lending aid to the White Russian troops as the uneasy alliance between the Czechs and anti-Bolshevik Russians reached the peak of its strength in late 1918. From Omsk, capital of the anti-Soviet government in Siberia, word came that some of the secretaries were "serving apparently interchangeably in both Czech and Russian army."<sup>31</sup> They were providing both groups with canteen supplies (cigarettes, tobacco, tea, coffee, biscuits, candy, thread, toilet articles, sweaters, boots, gloves) for very low prices. They provided educational and entertainment opportunities. Secretaries viewed all this as neutral service—that is, service to soldiers.

The work in Siberia also encountered difficulties. The Association found itself in troubled relations with the Kolchak government in Omsk. One secretary, E. T. Heald, reported to Mott from Omsk in early February 1919 that military reverses of the Kolchak government had led to hostility against the YMCA. He said the Omsk government had two groups: the "progressive group" led by Kolchak and Foreign Minister I. I. Soukin, and the General Staff made up of "reactionary monarchical leftovers of the old regime." The latter opposed all "democratic influences and such outside influences as the American Red Cross and the YMCA." Though the YMCA secretaries were received warmly by soldiers of the Provisional Siberian government, the General Staff moved to close the YMCA barracks club at Cheliabinsk. The Association's Russian secretaries were suspected of spreading Bolshevik propaganda and accused of encouraging disobedient and mutinous acts by soldiers. If the YMCA wished to continue in Western Siberia, the Omsk government demanded that it employ only American citizens in work with Russian soldiers; conduct its activities outside the soldiers' quarters; confine its program to entertainment—sports, motion pictures, canteens, amusements; avoid education or training; and submit a detailed planned program and undertake

30. The best account of the YMCA and the Czechs is by E. T. Heald, "With the Czecho-Slovak and Other Allied Armies in Russia," box 146-B, World Service, Russian YMCA Materials. See also Heald's memoirs, recently published: James B. Gidney, ed., *Witness to Revolution: Letters from Russia, 1916-1919* (Kent, Ohio, 1972), and *The Y.M.C.A. with the Czecho-Slovak Army* (Prague: Vojensky Domov, 1919).

31. Ernest L. Harris, American consul in Omsk, to Secretary of State, Dec. 30, 1918, telegram, box 5, X947, Russian YMCA Materials.

no activities without approval. Heald telegraphed these conditions to G. Sidney Phelps, now YMCA senior secretary in Siberia, who accepted them. Heald then had an interview with Soukin, who urged the YMCA to continue and indicated that legislation would soon be passed that would uphold privileges granted the Association by the Kerensky government. Heald appealed to Mott for 126 secretaries and a budget of 21,000,000 rubles for Western Siberia. "Send the men and the funds," he urged.<sup>32</sup>

Mott never had a chance to act on the request, for Kolchak refused to confirm the Kerensky privileges, and the General Staff demanded withdrawal of all YMCA staff from the war front on March 22, 1919. Phelps in Omsk then had three interviews with the foreign minister. After stressing the concessions granted by Kerensky, he listed the activities the YMCA proposed for Siberia: approved service with Russian soldiers, modern community work, regular city activities, rural service, aid to returning prisoners of war, and service to railway employees. "All of the above activities of the YMCA," he assured the foreign minister, "would be entirely non-political, non-military, non-commercial, and non-sectarian" and conducted in consultation with the government. The many problems the Association had encountered convinced him of the need to cooperate. To do this, however, the Omsk regime had to grant the Kerensky concessions, especially duty-free passage of goods west from Vladivostok.<sup>33</sup> The foreign minister's response was a demand that the YMCA cease all service to other Russians not under Kolchak's rule.

32. Heald to Colton, Feb. 2, 1919, box 5, X947, Russian YMCA Materials. See also the Siberian Report of G. S. Phelps, Nov. 3, 1920, box 5, X947, Colton Collection, and "Memoirs of G. Sidney Phelps: The Drama of the Siberian Expedition of the Y.M.C.A., 1918-1920," Apr. 1, 1954, box 7, both in the Russian YMCA Materials. Heald was not the only one who expected the YMCA to remain in Western Siberia. The consul in Omsk, Harris, thought the problems had been worked out. See Harris to Secretary of State, Feb. 25, 1919, telegram no. 853, box 40, Henry White Papers, Library of Congress. These unfulfilled requests by Heald are cited as evidence that the YMCA was a key participant in counterrevolutionary activities. See Soskin, *Ocherki istorii kul'tury Sibiri*, pp. 147-48. Harris later changed his mind. He thought the problems could be worked out only by the YMCA countering Japanese influence and helping to stamp out the Bolsheviks. When the YMCA refused, Harris came to oppose the YMCA presence in Siberia, stating that it had Bolshevik sympathies and was dominated by moneygrubbers. The YMCA denied these charges, which clearly resulted from the failure of the YMCA actively to support the Kolchak regime. See R. W. Hollinger to Harris, Oct. 23, 1919, box 1, William Graves Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, and also Harris to Secretary of State, Dec. 10, 1918, 861.00/3437, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918, Russia*, 2:458-60. The best summary of Harris's charges against the YMCA appears in his report, "The Allies in Siberia," Report to the State Department, Aug. 29, 1921, 861.00/9050, Entry 555, Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives.

33. Phelps to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Russian Provisional Government, May 30, 1919, box 7, Roland S. Morris Papers, Library of Congress. It should be noted that

By July 1919, Phelps wrote the American ambassador in Japan, Roland S. Morris, that Omsk had refused to give the YMCA official status and the Association could not "continue to labor under the dead weight of assignment to the position of a mere commercial organization as is now the case." Such appeals went for naught. The Kolchak government viewed the Association with suspicion and blamed the YMCA for the difficulties that began to occur among the troops. The YMCA did not easily give up. Colton, back in the United States, appealed to Boris Bakhmeteff, still accredited as Russian ambassador in Washington. Colton recounted the Association's difficulties with the Omsk authorities, who had charged that the YMCA was commercialized, that Jews were employed, that it was a "cloak for proselytization," and that its secretaries were pro-Bolshevik. For such reasons Kolchak had ordered all activities west of Irkutsk to cease. Colton denied the charges and asked assistance. He offered to forgo the financial concessions the YMCA had requested, for the last thing the Association wanted was to "withdraw when the need is so great." Bakhmeteff's response was to encourage the Association to continue aid to the Russian people.<sup>34</sup>

Service with the Czechs and the Allied troops continued all the while and was much appreciated. American officials in particular gave the Association high marks. Rear Admirals Austin Knight and Eustace Rogers and Major General William Graves praised the YMCA's work. American troops came to appreciate the YMCA.<sup>35</sup> The Association continued civil work in Eastern Siberia, especially in areas controlled by the Czechs and the Allies, as well as assistance to former prisoners of war. But even in Eastern Siberia it became an object of controversy, criticized by supporters of the Kolchak government, Japanese military officials, and the people who surrounded the local chieftains, Atamans Kalmikov and Semenov. Local newspapers termed the secretaries "Christian boys."<sup>36</sup>

By August 1919 the YMCA sent Colton and C. V. Hibbard, another YMCA representative, to Washington to ask State Department officials about the future of work in Russia. It offered to withdraw if its presence was unwelcome. Basil Miles, an assistant to the secretary of state, thought the

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the YMCA was also having trouble with both Russian and Japanese officials over the use of the Chinese Eastern Railroad in Manchuria. See, for example, John K. Caldwell to Secretary of State, Nov. 21, 1918, 861.00/3254, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918, Russia*, 2:437-38.

34. Phelps to Morris, July 11, 1919, box 7, Morris Papers, Library of Congress; Colton to Bakhmeteff, Oct. 31, 1919, and Bakhmeteff to Colton, Dec. 17, 1919, box 5, X947, Russian YMCA Materials.

35. Statement of Admiral Austin M. Knight, Feb. 8, 1919, box X673, World War I, Russian YMCA Materials.

36. For Russian newspaper stories critical of the YMCA see Record Group 395, Historical File, AEF in Siberia, Department of War Records in the National Archives.

YMCA should remain, and offered to cable Ambassador Morris and the consul in Omsk, Ernest L. Harris, asking them to defend the Association's program. About a week after these State Department assurances Morris cabled the Washington government that the YMCA was "being severely criticized," and he had heard from several sources that the problems in Siberia "would be greatly relieved if the YMCA would withdraw all its representatives." The Department was forced to consider the possible recall of the Association from Siberia. But events were happening fast, and the government was soon considering a much greater recall—that of the American military and diplomatic presence itself from Siberia, after the collapse of the Omsk government. On January 2, 1920, Graves informed Phelps that American troops would shortly leave Siberia, having already been pulled out of North Russia. Not long afterward the majority of YMCA secretaries departed with the American and Czech troops. Phelps had concluded, as Morris did, that they should leave.<sup>37</sup> Phelps was replaced by Edgar MacNaughton, who took charge of civil work at the Vladivostok YMCA. MacNaughton was in turn succeeded by Bracket Lewis.

In hope of better days, the New York office of the Association was making preparations for a continued presence in Russia. In conferences in February and April 1920 the YMCA Russian Committee planned the future, confident that the Soviet government would recognize the neutrality that the YMCA felt it had maintained. The proceedings indicate that the Association had learned from its experience. During the February meeting, held in Newark, the committee noted that its main responsibility now was for areas under control of Soviet Russia, and "re-entrance should be conditioned on the approval of the Association's program by the proper authorities of the Russian Government, and be made with the knowledge and consent of the United States Government."<sup>38</sup> The YMCA planned to keep its Vladivostok outpost as long as possible, but would attempt to re-enter other sections of Soviet Russia, abandoned since the autumn of 1918.

The service planned for Russia was scheduled for Moscow, Petrograd, Kiev, Odessa, Kharkov, and Kazan, with a staff of twenty-two secretaries, working in cooperation with Russian associates. The committee noted: "We

37. Memorandum of a visit to the State Department by Colton and Hibbard, Aug. 6, 1919, box 146-B, World Services, Russian YMCA Materials; and Morris to Secretary of State, Aug. 14, 1919, and Jan. 17, 1920, box 5, Morris Papers. Some of the secretaries did stay, even outside of Vladivostok, after 1920. But they soon left. Rev. William Tucker did not leave until 1921, and his personal papers indicate the kinds of activities these remaining secretaries were engaged in.

38. "Findings of the Russia Conference, February 21–23, 1920," box 5, X947, Russian YMCA Materials.

need to keep constantly in mind that we are engaged in establishing, not an *American*, but a *Russian* YMCA." It realized that education would be under control of the Soviet government, but other services were possible in the cities. It hoped to set up rural programs in South and Central Russia, and a boys' work program. At the April meeting, in New York City, the Russian Committee went over the whole connection between the Association and Russia, believing that the YMCA had been as neutral as possible. From these two meetings the International Committee of the YMCA came up with a policy statement concerning political activities of its representatives. The organization was to be guided "by the principle of neutrality toward issues on which the people . . . divide into parties." Members were not to use the organization or its name to further any political beliefs, and the YMCA was to serve all groups. Secretaries assigned to a country obligated themselves to respect the authority of the country's government.<sup>39</sup>

This statement showed the continuing difficulties the YMCA had in understanding Bolshevism; and the Soviet government, of course, had other ideas. The Soviet view became plain in an interview by two YMCA secretaries, Sherwood Eddy and Paul Anderson, with Maxim Litvinov in Copenhagen during mid-July 1920. Litvinov said that the Soviet government felt bitter toward the American government because of intervention in the Civil War. The American Red Cross and the YMCA appeared as tools of the Washington government; under the cloak of these organizations great harm had been done to Russia. Litvinov referred harshly to President Wilson, Russia's chief enemy, who had posed as Russia's best friend. He contended that America had "stabbed Russia in the back, misrepresented, and betrayed her." The YMCA "took no move apart from the Government, . . . and could not be regarded as a private friendly organization; . . . it did not have the confidence of the leaders that it did in former days." The Association was supported by a "reactionary capitalist class." The YMCA was not to be allowed in. The conversation turned to the question of aid for Russian prisoners of war still in Germany. Litvinov said the Soviet government would appreciate any material aid given to the prisoners, but when Anderson talked about supplying "that psychological element," Litvinov replied: "It is just that element that we do not wish you to supply, but which we prefer to supply ourselves." Since Eddy had a letter of introduction from Raymond Robins, he would be allowed to visit Soviet Russia, but only as an individual, not as an official of the

39. Meeting of Apr. 1, 1920, Memorandum, E. T. Colton, Records of Russia and Siberia, 1918-20, and Memorandum of Policy of the International Committee of the YMCA, "Regarding the Political Activities of Its Overseas Representatives," May 13, 1920, box 7, both in Russian YMCA Materials.

YMCA. Eddy wrote in his report of the conversation that he hoped to "break down the suspicion which exists against our work," but he met with little success.<sup>40</sup>

Later in 1920, Donald Lowrie, another YMCA secretary, went to Moscow as a representative of the Nansen Committee with a train of supplies and repatriated Russian prisoners of war, only to be told that his mission was over as soon as the train arrived.<sup>41</sup> He was instructed by S. Nuorteva, the undersecretary of the Department for Allied Nations, "to leave Russia as soon as possible." This official added that the Soviet government was very suspicious of "organizations claiming to be purely philanthropic," such as the YMCA. In 1921 six YMCA officials entered Russia as part of the American Relief Administration's work during the famine, and there were other contacts in the 1920s, but activities inside Russia were generally over.

The Vladivostok YMCA was allowed to struggle on until 1923, even after all foreign troops had left Siberia and the Soviets had taken over the Far Eastern Republic, because it performed some useful tasks. But the YMCA involvement with Russia in the 1920s was largely with Russians outside of their country. The Association aided Russian prisoners in Germany, and helped Russian émigrés in Western Europe, in the United States, in Constantinople, and in China. Involvement in these places was both large and long-standing. As an example, the International Committee of the YMCA established in 1921 a Russian-language publishing house called the YMCA Press, which continues as the most important Russian émigré press.<sup>42</sup>

The YMCA found its program in Russia at an end.<sup>43</sup> It had been impossible to remain neutral and give aid on a people-to-people basis in a revolutionary situation. Local regimes had welcomed material aid, resisted spiritual and

40. Hibbard to Cyrus H. McCormick, Aug. 10, 1920, box 116, Cyrus McCormick Papers, State Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin. McCormick was an old friend of President Wilson's and a strong supporter of the YMCA.

41. Donald Lowrie, "Notes on an Interview with Mr. Nuorteva, November 24, 1920," box 146-A, World Services, Russian YMCA Materials.

42. For details on these activities see "Russian Work-Policy Study," Nov. 23, 1943, box 8, and Paul Anderson, "Notes on the Development of Y.M.C.A. Work for Russians Outside Russia, 1919-1939," Feb. 19, 1940, box X947, both in Russian YMCA Materials. One aspect of aid to Russian émigrés in the United States was the establishment of the Russian Student Fund, Inc., which the YMCA helped support. Mott was on the Board of Directors of the Fund. The Fund, of which Norman Davis served as chairman, lent more than \$500,000 to 476 Russian students who attended American universities between 1921 and 1931, the period Davis headed the organization. For details of the Fund see the material in boxes 52-53, Norman H. Davis Papers, Library of Congress.

43. An American YMCA secretary was in the Soviet Union from 1923 until 1926 teaching physical education at the Soviet Higher Physical Education Institute in Moscow, but this was not an acceptance of YMCA activities by the Soviet government. Those activities ended in 1923.

educational work, demanded that they be the exclusive recipients of Association assistance, and viewed with suspicion YMCA activities with any other government claiming to represent the Russian people. In the end, all the regimes became dissatisfied, and the two main contenders for power, the governments of Lenin and Kolchak, curtailed YMCA activities and eventually called for its removal. The Association and its secretaries learned the difficulty, indeed the impossibility, of the kind of program they had undertaken. Hundreds of YMCA secretaries had gone to Russia, where they encountered man's inhumanity to man, and found their presence unwelcome.

One might very well ask why the American YMCA failed in Russia. Although the Association had exhibited remarkable flexibility in changing its role over the years between 1900 and 1923 in Russia, it had remained steadfast in its ultimate objective—Christian service to the Russian people. Such a goal was perhaps feasible before November 1917, but with the Bolshevik takeover in Russia and the Soviet victory in the Civil War, the objective of the YMCA's program was simply incompatible with the beliefs of the new Russian leaders. Neither side showed any willingness for meaningful compromise at that time, and thus the program of the American YMCA in Russia was over.