

Humanitarian Aid of the Red Cross and Other Public Organizations of the Netherlands to Soviet Russia During the Famine of 1921–1923¹

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Abstract. The historiography of the famine in Soviet Russia and Ukraine 1921–1923 includes a large number of academic papers covering foreign humanitarian aid to the starving population in the context of the work of such large organizations as the American Relief Administration, the Nansen Committee, etc. At the same time, there are practically no articles or theses that fully describe the assistance to the starving people in the Soviet Union from individual states and national aid committees. The purpose of this article is to highlight and summarize the main aspects of the activities of the Dutch charitable and public organizations on the territory of Soviet Russia and Ukraine during the famine of 1921–1923 on the basis of documents from the Russian central and regional archives, as well as the National Archives of Sweden, data from which we are introducing into scientific circulation for the first time. Despite the absence of diplomatic relations between Soviet Russia and the Netherlands, representatives of almost all sectors of Dutch society took part in these activities. The data we have collected allows us to identify four main channels through which humanitarian aid from the Netherlands was received in the areas affected by crop failure: 1) Pro-government and charitable public organizations (the Netherlands Red Cross, the Dutch branch of Save the Children International), which provided aid to the population in Volga Region, Crimea and in Ukraine. In addition to sending humanitarian supplies, the Netherlands Red Cross sent its own mission to Samara province; 2) Associations of trade unions of the Second International, which participated in the financing of an independent mission of the International Federation of Trade Unions to Chuvash Autonomous Oblast; 3) communist trade unions and associations of the Netherlands, acting through the Workers International Relief organization, which took part in the restoration of the Soviet national economy, and also maintained numerous orphanages in Soviet Russia; 4) Religious societies of Dutch Mennonite Protestants, which sent humanitarian aid to the places of settlement of people who shared their religious beliefs, where, at the insistence of the Soviet government, they provided aid to all those in need, regardless of religion. All the activities of various Dutch organizations and individual citizens in Soviet Russia and the

¹ English translation from the Russian text: Tsidenkov G. G. 2023. Gumanitarnaya pomoshch' Krasnogo Kresta i drugih obshchestvennykh organizatsiy Niderlandov Sovetskoy Rossii vo vremya goloda 1921–1923 gg. *Vestnik MGIMO-Universiteta* [MGIMO Review of International Relations]. 2023. 16(1). P. 87–105. <https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2023-1-88-87-105>

Ukraine showed the readiness of the population and political forces of the Netherlands to maintain close contacts and interaction between the peoples of the two countries, regardless of the official relations of states and political differences.

Keywords: the famine of 1921–1923; humanitarian aid; Netherlands Red Cross; Nansen Committee; Netherlands; Mennonites; “Mezhrabpom;” Ukraine; Volga Region; Crimea

During the famine that devastated Russia and Ukraine in 1921–1923, various foreign humanitarian organizations provided assistance to those who had been affected. Humanitarian aid from the Netherlands came via four main channels: the Netherlands Red Cross, the International Federation of Trade Unions, the Workers International Relief communist proletarian organization, and the Mennonites.

The Netherlands Red Cross was one of the few foreign organizations that was able to send a permanent mission to Russia to help starving people in disaster-stricken areas. It was also a member of the Nansen International Office for Refugees (the Nansen Committee) and Save the Children International (Save the Children), the largest humanitarian organization in Europe. The Netherlands Red Cross was active in one of the most affected areas – the Samara Governorate, where 2.6 million of the 2.775 million people living in the region found themselves without food at the peak of the famine.² The organization’s mission to Samara was supervised by the Swedish Red Cross.

Most Dutch trade unions were members of the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), which provided assistance to the population of Chuvash Autonomous Oblast.

The activities of the Workers International Relief were carried out primarily by the Communist Workers' Party of the Netherlands. The organization provided assistance to the national economy and ran numerous orphanages in Russia and Ukraine. The Dutch Mennonites were also active in Russia and Ukraine, both through the mediation of the Netherlands Red Cross and independently, as part of the Nansen Committee.

Various research papers have touched upon the humanitarian activities of the Netherlands Red Cross and other Dutch aid organizations in Soviet Russia and Ukraine during the famine of 1921–1923, but the information they provide is scattered and often random. As things stand, there is a gap in the scientific literature in terms of a comprehensive summary and analysis of the activities of Dutch humanitarian organizations in the Soviet Union during this period.

² *Famine in the Middle Volga Region in the 1920s–1930s. Vol. 1. Famine in the Samara Governorate in the 1920s.* 2014. Collection of Documents of the Samara Regional State Archive of Socio-Political History, Central State Archive of Samara Region. Samara. P. 18.

In fact, the work of the Netherlands Red Cross is touched upon only briefly in works that are devoted to larger organizations, such as Y. Anshakova's article on the work of the Nansen Committee in Samara Governorate (Anshakova 2012), where the Dutch mission is mentioned in passing. Other references to the humanitarian assistance provided by the Netherlands to the starving population can be found in works on the region's history, specifically, in the articles of V. Zarubin and V. Krapiventseva on the history of the Crimean Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic (Zarubin 2011: 214–215, 217–218; Krapiventseva 2010).

The activities of Dutch communist, proletarian and trade union organizations, as well as individual communists from the Netherlands, have been studied in greater detail. This is due to the attention paid in Soviet times to the contribution of the International People's Aid organization and industrial and agricultural communes of foreign countries to the restoration of the country's economy. References to the humanitarian aid of the Dutch communists and proletarian organizations can be found in the monographs of G. Tarle, D. Michev and A. Makarenko (Tarle 1968; Michev 1971; Makarenko 1961). Even so, the information provided in these works is incomplete. More than that, they do not touch upon the activities of other aid organizations from the Netherlands.

Most research papers on the humanitarian assistance provided by religious and sectarian organizations to the starving population of Soviet Russia and Ukraine have been published by large international organizations, such as the Joint Distribution Committee of American Funds for Relief to Jews Affected by the War (renamed the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in 1931) and the Religious Society of Friends (the Quakers). There is practically no information in the scientific literature about the humanitarian activities of the Dutch Mennonites, as their work was primarily carried out through the mediation of the Netherlands Red Cross and other organizations, and the scope of their activities in Crimea was relatively modest.

The main collection of documents on the activities of the Netherlands Red Cross in Samara Governorate can be found in the archives of Samara Region – in the Central State Archive of Samara Region, the Samara Regional State Archive of Socio-Political History, the funds of the Samara *Pomgol* ("Hunger Relief") organization; as well as in the National Archives of Sweden (Riksarkivet), and the funds of the Swedish Red Cross. The Samara archives contain reports of the Swedish Red Cross, which provide information about the work of the Netherlands Red Cross, its business correspondence with the Soviet authorities, and information on the areas of work of the Netherlands Red Cross. The National Archives of Sweden contain reports and logs of the Netherlands Red Cross's mission to the Soviet Union that were handed over to the Swedish Red Cross, as well as photographs of those who were part of the mission. An abundance of documentary evidence of the humanitarian activities of the International Federation of Trade Unions, the Workers International Relief and the Dutch Mennonites can be found in the State Archive of the Russian Federation and the regional archives of the Republic of Crimea and Samara Region.

In light of the above, this article has two goals:

- 1) To summarize information about the activities of the Netherlands to help the starving population of Soviet Russia and Ukraine in 1921–1923 in a single, comprehensive work. To highlight the main areas of this activity, as well as its geographic and demographic scope.
- 2) To identify the main sources of humanitarian aid from the Netherlands to the starving population of Soviet Russia and Ukraine.

The Netherlands Red Cross and the International Save the Children Union

In August 1921, a Russian Relief Committee was set up in the Netherlands to organize giving campaigns and coordinate the activities of the mission of the Netherlands Red Cross. Doctor Buricks was elected Secretary of the Committee. The first food shipments were ready to be sent to Riga by Swedish steamer as early as September 2, 1921,³ although the Committee's work did not begin in earnest until that autumn, when the Netherlands Red Cross took charge of fundraising activities.

The Netherlands Red Cross focused primarily on Samara Governorate, where Nansen Committee organizations had been active since the autumn of 1921. The Dutch mission to Samara Governorate operated under the direction of the Swedish Red Cross. There were a number of reasons for this:

- 1) At the time, the Swedish Red Cross was one of the leading Red Cross organizations, having carried out large-scale humanitarian operations during the First World War in the vast territories of Russia and the Central Powers.
- 2) The Swedish Red Cross received stable government funding, while the Netherlands Red Cross was for the most part funded by private donations. What is more, the Swedish side paid the freight charges for the steamships that delivered Dutch cargo to Petrograd and Reval.
- 3) The Swedish Red Cross had extensive experience working in Samara Governorate, launching a mission to help prisoners of war back in 1915 (for more on this, see Olson 2018), and a permanent mission to provide aid to the hungry on December 6, 1921 (Anshakova 2012: 449).

The mission of the Netherlands Red Cross left Rotterdam for Petrograd on the Swedish steamer *Karke* in late January 1922. On January 25, the delegate of the Netherlands Red Cross accompanying the cargo, one Johan Luger, wrote a letter to the Swedish Red Cross thanking them profusely for chartering the vessel and ensuring that the mission made it safely to Russia.⁴ The journey from Petrograd to Samara took far longer, with the Dutch train arriving at Samara railway station on February 24, 1922.

³ State Archive of the Russian Federation. Fund R-1064. Inv. 6. C. 10. S. 1.

⁴ National Archives of Sweden (Riksarkivet). SKR/Byrån för hjälpverksamhet i Ryssland/F/Vol. 2. Inc. 28. A. 2 No. 1711.

The mission initially consisted of four people: the leader of the expedition Dr. Eduard Riemersma, his deputy captain A. Mulder, the nurse Cornelia Fisel, and Johanna Ben-them.⁵ They were later joined by the Estonian doctor Margarita Linebakh,⁶ who was paid a salary by the Swedish Red Cross.⁷ The following cargo arrived along with the first train:

- five carriages of broths and soups – 4959 *poods* (approx. 81,232 kg) gross;
- one carriage of beans – 1000 *poods* (approx. 16,381 kg) gross; and
- one carriage of corn-flour – 972 *poods* (approx. 15,922 kg) gross;

On March 10, the remaining freight arrived:

- broths and soups – 166,015 kg;
- corn-flour – 75 795 kg;
- beans – 99 582 kg;
- wheat flour – 16 430 kg;
- dried vegetables – 9258 kg.⁸

The mission then transported these cargoes to its first destination – the village of Pestravka in Samara Governorate. The Netherlands Red Cross carried out its work in accordance with the rules established by the Swedish Red Cross:

- providing hot meals for hungry children in canteens;
- providing assistance in the purchase of cattle;
- providing assistance in the purchase of the necessary agricultural equipment;
- providing high-quality seeds for sowing seeds;
- providing sanitary care to help fight against infections (in the form of clothes and bed linen), sanitization, vaccinations.

Each delegate was assigned a special *volost*⁹ centre, where they were responsible for providing humanitarian assistance, maintained a dialogue with elected representatives from the local peasants, and organized community work (Tsidenkov 2018b: 180).

To ensure that the rations contained the necessary number of calories, the Dutch and Swedish missions exchanged products with each other, as well as with the mission of the Czechoslovak Red Cross, which was operating in the same region (Tsidenkov 2018a: 67). The calorie content of the rations provided by Nansen Committee organizations in Samara Governorate averaged 1250 calories (Anshakova 2012: 450). The canteens of the three missions served the exact same menu:

Monday: rye bread (225 g), millet porridge with vegetables (72 g), Swedish her-ring (300 g);

Tuesday: rye bread (225 g), pease porridge with vegetables (170 g), Swedish her-ring (300 g);

⁵ Riksarkivet. 730236 Svenska Röda Korset, 18 Samaraexpeditionen 1919–1924. Fotosamling, Serie 1. Vol. 17.

⁶ Central State Archive of the Samara Region. Fund R-79. Inv. 1. C. 245. S. 56.

⁷ Riksarkivet. SKR/Byrån för hjälpverksamhet i Ryssland/F/Vol. 2.

⁸ Central State Archive of the Samara Region. Fund R-79. Inv. 1. C.108. S. 2.

⁹ A peasant community consisting of several villages or hamlets in Russia (Collins Dictionary) [translator's note].

Wednesday: rye bread (225 g), pease porridge with a millet admixture (170 g), Swedish herring (300 g);

Thursday: rye bread (225 g), potato pancaked (100 g), Swedish herring (300 g), as well as 5 g of *saló*, 5 g of salt, 5 g of powdered milk to take away;

Friday: rye bread (225 g), pasta (75 g), milk (380 g), as well as 10 g of *saló* and 75 g of corned beef to take away;

Saturday: rye bread (225 g), rice with margarine (95 g), Swedish herring (300 g), apple marmalade (80 g);

Sunday: same as Wednesday (Tsidenkov 2018a: 68).

The village of Pestravka became the centre of operations of the Netherlands Red Cross. Bakeries, canteens, and storage rooms for food, medicines and equipment were set up in the *volost* centres, with humanitarian assistance then being sent to the surrounding villages.

Netherlands Red Cross deliveries arrived in Samara by rail once or twice a month, which made it possible to significantly expand its area of activities, as well as to open orphanages and medical centres. By July 1922, the Netherlands Red Cross was operating primarily in the villages on the border of Samara and Pugachev districts. Typhoid hospitals were opened in the Samarovka and Dmitrievka *volost* centres, and outpatient clinics operated at other *volost* centres and in Pestravka. In addition, the Netherlands Red Cross maintained City Hospital No. 5 in Samara, as well as a hospital in Pestravka, orphanages in Koldyban, Kolokoltsovka, Dmitrievka and Samarovka.¹⁰

The “Schematic Map of Food Stations of the International, Netherlands, Swedish and Czechoslovak Ref Cross” compiled by the leadership of the Swedish Red Cross shows that the activities of the Netherlands Red Cross in June–July 1922 were concentrated in the villages of Pestravka, Kolokoltsovka, Dmitrievka, Moksha, Samarovka, Tomylovo and Pokrovskoye.¹¹ The Netherlands Red Cross operated warehouses, outpatient clinics, food stations and bakeries in all these villages, and the population received hot rations. Surrounding villages were attached to the *volost* centres, and dry rations were distributed to the local population from special nutrition points.¹² A total of 19 canteens were set up in these *volosts*, with a capacity of 13,833 people per day.¹³

Orphanages were opened in the villages of Tomylovo and Vyazovy Gai, run and funded by the Netherlands Red Cross. They were staffed by Russians, while the nurse Johanna Benthem was put in charge of the day-to-day operations.¹⁴

¹⁰ *Famine in the Middle Volga Region in the 1920s–1930s*. 2014. Collection of Documents. Samara. P. 332.

¹¹ Riksarkivet. SKR/Byrå för hjälpverksamhet i Ryssland/C1/. Vol. 3.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Central State Archive of the Samara Region. Fund R-79. Inv. 1, C.108. S. 7.

¹⁴ Riksarkivet. SKR/Byrå för hjälpverksamhet i Ryssland/C1/. Vol. 4.

By August 1, 1922, the Netherlands Red Cross was feeding, clothing and providing medicines to 25,200 people, including 12,200 children, in the *volosts* every day.¹⁵ Children, the elderly, the infirm, pregnant women and women with young children received food rations free of charge, while everyone else had to carry out socially useful work (repairing roads and buildings, cleaning the streets, delivering food and medicines, etc.) in order to receive their rations.¹⁶ With the help of the Netherlands Red Cross, the Nansen Committee provided food for 61,000 adults and 78,000 children in Samara Governorate in July–August 1922.¹⁷

By the end of the summer, almost all foreign aid organizations had started to curtail their activities in the affected areas, citing the good harvest that was expected in the Volga Region in 1922. However, in August it became clear that the harvest would again be poor due to drought and an abnormally large locust infestation, estimated at a total weight of 44 million tonnes (Valieva 1965: 17). Most foreign aid organizations were unable to pick up their humanitarian efforts where they left off, and some left the country altogether. The Netherlands Red Cross, meanwhile, only slightly reduced the scale of its work. This can be explained by the so-called “Dutch foresight” – upon inspection of the crops in the controlled area, Dr. Riemersma and Captain Mulder concluded that the harvest would not be a good one:

“Of the 340 square fathoms of rye that were sown, 80 square fathoms are unusable, 157 square fathoms are in poor condition, 87 square fathoms are in satisfactory condition, and 15 square fathoms are in good condition.

“Of the 78 square fathoms of wheat, 33 square fathoms are unusable, 40 square fathoms are in poor condition, and 5 square fathoms are in satisfactory condition.

“Of the 134 square fathoms of barley, 77 square fathoms are unusable, 37 square fathoms are in poor condition, and 20 square fathoms are in satisfactory condition.

“Of the 17 square fathoms of oats, 10 square fathoms are unusable, and 7 square fathoms are in poor condition.

“Of the 432 square fathoms of millet, all 432 square fathoms are unusable.”¹⁸

On the basis of this information, the Netherlands Red Cross, having reduced the size of its assistance to 12,000 rations per day by September 17, 1922,¹⁹ upped its aid once again starting on October 1 to 16,000 rations per day.²⁰

The Netherlands Red Cross continued to operate in Samara Governorate until August 15, 1923.²¹ The organization continued to feed the population throughout the winter of 1922/23, averaging approximately 10,000 people per day,²² which increased

¹⁵ *Famine in the Middle Volga Region in the 1920s–1930s*. 2014. Collection of Documents. Samara. P. 332.

¹⁶ Riksarkivet. SKR/Byrån för hjälpverksamhet i Ryssland/F/. Vol. 2.

¹⁷ Central State Archive of the Samara Region. Fund R-79. Inv. 1. C. 8. S. 358.

¹⁸ Riksarkivet. SKR/Byrån för hjälpverksamhet i Ryssland/F/. Vol.2.

¹⁹ Central State Archive of the Samara Region. Fund R-79. Inv. 1. C. 91. S. 165.

²⁰ *Famine in the Middle Volga Region in the 1920s–1930s*. 2014. Collection of Documents. Samara. P. 330.

²¹ Central State Archive of the Samara Region. Fund R-79. Inv. 1. C. 8. S. 358.

²² *Famine in the Middle Volga Region in the 1920s–1930s*. 2014. Collection of Documents. Samara. P. 330.

to 17,689 people per day the following spring.²³ In late May 1923, the Netherlands Red Cross halted its programme to feed the population in Samara Governorate. The subsequent months, June and July, were spent winding down its activities and transferring the now vacated properties to the Soviet authorities and the Swedish Red Cross, which continued to work in Samara Governorate until the summer of 1924.

In addition to its humanitarian activities, the Netherlands Red Cross made a significant contribution to the demographics of the Samara Governorate. In the *volosts* run by the Red Cross societies of Sweden and the Netherlands, data necessary for organizing assistance to the population was calculated and reconciliated, thus painting a clear picture of the movement of the population, the economic situation in individual *volosts*, and the ramifications of the famine. Data from the Dmitrievskaya *volost* collected under the supervision of Dr. Rimersm in August 1922 gives us an idea of just how hard the famine, as well as the First World War and the Civil War, hit certain areas of Samara Governorate (see Table 1).

Table 1. Number of Births and Deaths in the Dmitrievskaya Volost of the Pugachev District in 1914, 1919, 1920, 1921 and 1922.

Year:	Male births	Female births	Male deaths	Female deaths	Total number of residents
1914	255	256	122	124	8396
1919	168	170	136	144	8110
1920	221	207	106	111	7728
1921	239	230	237	223	5989
January–June 1922	47	34	250	206	5395

Source: Based on Riksarkivet, SE/RA/Svenska Röda Korset/730236/1/18 Samaraexpeditionen 1919-1924. Vol. 2F.

As we can see, the mortality rate in the *volost* increased sharply in 1921 and remained high during the first half of the following year. At the same time, the population was declining at a far greater pace than the mortality rate, the result of refugees fleeing the region.

²³ Central State Archive of the Samara Region. Fund R-79. Inv. 1. C. 8. S. 358.

Table 2. Livestock in the Villages of Dmitrievka and Bogdanovka of the Dmitriev Volost in 1914, 1920, and 1921 to the first half of 1922.

	1914	1920	1921–14.07.1922
Horses	Dmitrievka – 1744 Bogdanovka – 1957	Dmitrievka – 1228 Bogdanovka – 1342	Dmitrievka – 251 Bogdanovka – 308
Camels	Dmitrievka – 92 Bogdanovka – 168	Dmitrievka – 68 Bogdanovka – 98	Dmitrievka – 24 Bogdanovka – 73
Cows	Dmitrievka – 953 Bogdanovka – 1192	Dmitrievka – 1170 Bogdanovka – 1639	Dmitrievka – 425 Bogdanovka – 416
Sheep and goats	Dmitrievka – 3724 Bogdanovka – 5224	Dmitrievka – 3397 Bogdanovka – 4026	Dmitrievka – 131 Bogdanovka – 251
Hogs	Dmitrievka – 540 Bogdanovka – 519	Dmitrievka – 118 Bogdanovka – 89	Dmitrievka – 0 Bogdanovka – 0
Chickens	Dmitrievka – 4608 Bogdanovka – 11041	Dmitrievka – 4200 Bogdanovka – 6740	Dmitrievka – 300 Bogdanovka – 573

Source: Based on Riksarkivet, SE/RA/Svenska Röda Korset/730236/1/18 Samaraexpeditionen 1919–1924. Vol. 2F.

From the data presented in Table 2, we can conclude that there was a dramatic, although not critical, drop in plow cattle and livestock in peasant farms during the years of the First World War, the Civil War and War Communism. The catastrophic famine of 1921 quite literally destroyed the population, reducing the number of livestock several times over, depriving peasants of a means of transport, as well as horsepower for field work, and decimating the pig population.

The work of the statistical agencies in many of the famine-stricken areas left much to be desired, and the data collected by the Red Cross organizations was crucial in the distribution not only of foreign, but also of Soviet, humanitarian aid, and was subsequently used in the restoration and development of the national economy.

The Soviet authorities provided full assistance to the Netherlands Red Cross mission in Samara Governorate, keeping in close contact with the Swedish leadership. The activities of the Swedish Red Cross and the Nansen Committee as a whole were considered exemplary and nonconfrontational. On numerous occasions, the mission of the Swedish Red Cross in Samara, which included the mission of the Netherlands Red Cross, received official thanks and praise from Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, a high-ranking Bolshevik who headed up the Samara Governorate's Executive Committee.²⁴

²⁴ *Kommuna*. 4 February 1922. P. 2.

In addition to its work in Samara Governorate, the Netherlands Red Cross was also active in the Crimean Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic, carrying out its own operations independent of those in Samara on a non-recurrent basis in conjunction with the organizations of the German and Italian Red Cross in areas where Dutch and German colonists had settled. In early May 1922, representatives of the Italian and Netherlands Red Cross societies brought around 3000 poods (c. 49,140 kg) of food to Crimea,²⁵ and in August 1923 the Netherlands Red Cross, together with its partner organization in Germany, delivered two train carriages and four tractors-worth of food to the Republic.²⁶

As we noted earlier, the Netherlands Red Cross was part of Save the Children International, and it used its infrastructure and resources to raise funds and deliver goods from the organization to Russia and Ukraine. On the ground, these cargoes were distributed by Save the Children International's own mission, which operated primarily in Saratov Governorate and the Labour Commune of Volga Germans, where, at the peak of its activity in the summer of 1922, it provided food for 301,500 children (Anshakova 2017: 80), as well as in large cities in the famine-stricken territory. According to a Save the Children International report on the activities of its mission to Soviet Russia, the Netherlands Red Cross delivered a total of 1,313,988 rations to help starving children in the Volga Region between October 1, 1921 and July 31, 1923.²⁷

From June 1922 to May 1923, Save the Children International launched a widespread campaign to feed children in Ukraine: a total of 84 canteens were opened in Kharkiv, Poltava, Kyiv, Odessa, Nikolaev, Yekaterinoslav, Elisavetgrad and Zaporozhye, providing hot meals to 29,200 children. Of these, 2650 were fed by the Netherlands Red Cross.²⁸

In the context of the activities of the Netherlands Red Cross and Save the Children International in Soviet Russia, we cannot ignore the failed project to relocate children from starving areas to the Netherlands to help them recuperate. On July 17, 1922, the Netherlands branch of Save the Children International wrote to the plenipotentiary of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic Nikolay Krestinsky with an official proposal to place some 150 children from starving provinces in Dutch families. The idea was the collective brainchild, first and foremost, of the families of Dutch farmers, workers, teachers and other representatives of the middle class. The Dutch government agreed in principle to take in Soviet children, with one condition – that they all had to be quarantined before being allowed into the country proper. The Dutch side was responsible for getting the children through the Baltic countries and Germany by train.²⁹

²⁵ State Archive of the Russian Federation. Fund R-1058. Inv. 1. C. 448. S. 9.

²⁶ State Archive of the Russian Federation. Fund R-1058. Inv. 1. C.285. S. 41.

²⁷ L'Union internationale de secours aux enfants en Russie, 1921–1923. Bulletin No. 60, décembre 1923. P. 1184.

²⁸ Ibid. P. 1190.

²⁹ State Archive of the Russian Federation. Fund R-1064. Inv. 6. C. 71. S. 2.



Pic. 1. Poster of the Dutch Red Cross with an appeal to donate funds to help the starving children of Russia

On July 18, Krestinsky forwarded the letter to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs and Head of the Foreign Department of the Pomgol Central Committee, Olga Kameneva.³⁰ On July 29, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs officially agreed, "for political reasons."³¹ However, on July 27, the Children's Commission of the All-Russian Executive Committee and the Pomgol Central Committee refused to "evacuate any children abroad."³² On August 10, the People's Commissariat for Education also came out against sending children to the Netherlands, citing the failed project to evacuate children to Czechoslovakia: sending the children turned out to be extremely expensive and, upon arrival, the children were bullied and mistreated because they came from a Soviet country.³³ Evidently, the People's Commissariat for Education was referring to the incident in the quarantine camp in the Czechoslovakian town of

³⁰ Ibid. P. 2.

³¹ Ibid. P. 24.

³² State Archive of the Russian Federation. Fund R-1064. Inv. 6. C. 71. S. 24.

³³ Ibid. P. 28.

Pardubice, where “former Wrangel officers” from the Cossack unit stationed nearby infiltrated the detention centre and subjected the Soviet children to humiliation and torture (Smirnova 2007: 77). In the end, the protests of the Pomgol Central Committee, the Children’s Commission of the All-Russian Executive Committee and the People’s Commissariat for Education won out and no children were evacuated to the Netherlands.

The International Federation of Trade Unions

The second most important organization in delivering humanitarian aid from the Netherlands to famine-stricken Soviet Russia was the International Federation of Trade Unions, also known as the Amsterdam International. Established in Amsterdam in 1919, the IFTU brought together 17,74 million trade union members from Europe, America, Australia and South Africa (Van Goethem 2001: 27). Despite the fact that the IFTU, which followed in the footsteps of the Second International, was at odds with the communist trade unions and refused to cooperate with the communist Workers International Relief, it nevertheless played an active and independent role in helping starving people in Soviet Russia and Ukraine,

The IFTU concluded an agreement with the Soviet Union on November 5, 1921, under which it promised to provide food for 40,000 people in Chuvash Autonomous Oblast.³⁴ The IFTU established the Commission for Assistance to the Starving in Russia, which was headed by the prominent English trade unionist James O’Grady.³⁵ According to O’Grady, the IFTU had managed to raise 50,000 pounds in donations from union members by January 1922 and planned to get the sum up to 200,000 pounds.³⁶

The IFTU mission began its work in Chuvash Autonomous Oblast in January 1922, and by February 20, it had opened 516 canteens in the region, feeding a total of 37,851 people.³⁷ At the peak of its activity in June 1922, the IFTU was operating 441 canteens in Chuvash Autonomous Oblast, providing food to 96,628 people, including 45,126 children.³⁸ However, by July, the organization had run out of funding to continue its work and drastically cut the amount of food it was supplying, before ceasing its activities shortly afterwards. At present, it is impossible to discern the actual amount of humanitarian aid that Dutch trade unions contributed. That said, the following facts serve as proof of the active participation of the Dutch side in the work of the IFTU mission:

³⁴ State Archive of the Russian Federation. Fund R-1058. Inv. 1. C. 89. S. 9.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ *Morning Post*. 6 January 1922. P. 3.

³⁷ Central State Archive of the Samara Region. Fund R-79. Inv. 1. C. 8. S. 53.

³⁸ State Archive of the Russian Federation. Fund R-1058. Inv. 1. C. 49. S. 55.

the first expedition led by O'Grady included the Mayor of Amsterdam Willem de Vlugt,³⁹ who was accompanied by an impressive delegation of Dutch employees (Alexandrov 1960: 25–26);

from the autumn of 1922 to June 1923, the IFTU cargo trains were accompanied by the Dutch trade unionist and politician Thomson. During one of the trips, in January 1923, Thomson had a bag containing 30,000 French francs stolen. The culprits were never found.⁴⁰

The Workers International Relief Organization

The Workers International Relief organization (Internationale Arbeiterhilfe) was set up at the initiative of Vladimir Lenin and the prominent German communist Willi Münzenberg in Berlin in August 1921. Initially, its main task was to provide proletarian assistance in the fight against hunger in Soviet Russia. Its founding conference was attended by representatives of virtually all the communist parties in Europe, as well as by scientists, engineers, artists and writers with communist leanings.

Dutch assistance through the Workers International Relief is primarily associated with the name of Sebald Justinus Rutgers, the founder of the famous Kuzbass Autonomous Industrial Colony. The engineer and communist Rutgers managed to bring together hundreds of foreign engineers, miners and workers, who in record time turned the Kuzbass region into one of the most important centres of the coal industry. The Rutgers group was responsible for increasing coal production in the Kuzbass basin by 238% in the period 1923–1925, while managing to cut production costs by 41%. The chemical and power plants were renovated, and most mines were electrified (Michev 1971: 81; for more on the Kuzbass Autonomous Industrial Colony, see Tarle 1968).

The Dutch communists were involved in the work of the Workers International Relief from the very beginning. The founding committee included the famous Dutch poetess and author of the Dutch text for the anthem “The Internationale,” Henriette Roland Holst-van der Schalk (Michev 1971: 48). By September 1921, some 2000 Dutch communists had sent 10,000 guilders to the Workers International Relief (Makarenko 1963: 148), and throughout the entire hunger relief campaign of 1921–1922, it raised around half a million guilders for starving people in Russia.⁴¹ The money donated by the Dutch communists was used for the upkeep of two orphanages – one named after Karl Marx in Samara that homed 70 children, and another in Smolino, Nizhny Novgorod Governorate for 85 children.⁴²

³⁹ Alexandrov mistakenly has “Wooders” [author’s note].

⁴⁰ State Archive of the Russian Federation. Fund R-1058. Inv. 1. C. 365. S. 358.

⁴¹ *Bulletin of the IV World Congress of the Communist International*. 1922. No. 18. P. 11.

⁴² State Archive of the Russian Federation. Fund R-1065. Inv. 3. C. 38. S. 193–195.

On top of that, a commune school for 175 orphans was opened in Chelyabinsk in 1922, with the support of the Union of Youth of the Netherlands, Germany, France and Japan (Kameneva 1923: 60–61).

The Mennonites

A number of religious and sectarian aid organizations operated in Soviet Russia and Ukraine in 1921–1923. The vast majority of them sought to work in places densely populated by people who shared their religious beliefs. The Soviet government did not interfere with this policy. Instead, it insisted that the population in the trust territories receive the same level of assistance. The Nansen Committee was responsible for distributing the assistance for those affected by the famine from Dutch (and German) Mennonites.

In September 1921, the representative of the Dutch Mennonites Jacob Koekebakker notified the Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the Russian SFSR Maxim Litvinov that the Mennonite communities of the Netherlands were planning on providing food assistance to those who shared their religious beliefs in the Kher-son, Yekaterinoslav and Taurida governorates, as well as to settlements in the Samara and Ufa governorates.⁴³ As part of an agreement with the Nansen Committee signed in October 1921, a separate contract was drawn up with the Dutch Mennonites, represented by Koekebakker, under which they pledged to provide humanitarian assistance to the population of Mennonite colonies, regardless of faith, in the amount of 75,000 U.S. dollars.⁴⁴

The Dutch Mennonites carried out the bulk of their activities in Ukraine and Crimea – places where the majority of people who shared their faith had resettled. The first canteens were opened in the Zaporizhzhia and Nikolaev governorates in Ukraine and operated from May to October 1922, providing food for 21,000 people every day.⁴⁵

A separate expedition of eight Dutch Mennonite missionaries operated in the Crimean Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic. The mission was headed by Jogens, a prominent farmer and co-founder of Altius & Co., which worked on an equal footing with the Soviet Severoles.⁴⁶ The mission focused its activities in the eastern part of Yev-patoriysky Uyezd, which received cargo from Sevastopol. Six train carriages from the Netherlands and four from Germany loaded with wheat and beans were distributed among the local population by the Jogens mission.⁴⁷ In total, the Dutch Mennonites distributed 60,000 *poods* (almost 1 million kg) of food to the people of Crimea under the auspices of the German Red Cross between May and September 1922.⁴⁸

⁴³ State Archive of the Russian Federation. Fund R-1064. Inv. 6. C. 6. S. 39.

⁴⁴ State Archive of the Russian Federation. Fund R-1058. Inv. 1. C. 217. S. 7.

⁴⁵ State Archive of the Russian Federation. Fund R-1058. Inv. 1. C. 49. S. 55.

⁴⁶ State Archive of the Russian Federation. Fund R-1058. Inv. 1. C. 14. S. 16.

⁴⁷ Ibid. S. 6.

⁴⁸ State Archive of the Russian Federation. Fund R-1058. Inv. 1. C. 14. S. 16.

In addition to food aid, the Dutch Mennonites wanted to set up a model agricultural commune in Crimea; Jogens even imported 45,000 poods (around 740,000 kg) of seeds by ship to Sevastopol for this purpose.⁴⁹ However, during the negotiations, it came out that Jogens was planning to use the crops produced by the future commune to provide food for the employees of larger enterprises, namely, the former Russian–French metallurgical plant in Kerch Region and the Saki bromine plant, whose adjacent lake provided the algae bromine.⁵⁰ The Dutch side was interested in acquiring these enterprises under a long-term license. The Crimean authorities thought that the deal would not be strategically profitable and suggested that Jogens distribute the imported seeds among the population of Yevpatoriysky Uyezd instead, which he duly did.⁵¹

The Mennonites in Samara Governorate received goods for further distribution from the Netherlands Red Cross, and the relevant data is included in the general statistics on the work of that organization given above.

Conclusion

Until now, the assistance provided by the Netherlands to Soviet Russia and Ukraine during the famine of 1921–1923 has received little attention among researchers. In this article, we have attempted to summarize and structure the information that is available on this subject. As we can see, the assistance provided by the Netherlands, modest as it was, was of a complex nature, entering all areas of humanitarian activity. Most of the aid was directed to the Volga Region, Crimea and the Eastern provinces of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Its main sources were:

- public and charitable organizations (the Netherlands Red Cross, Save the Children offices in the Netherlands);
- communist and socialist worker's collectives and individual activists;
- trade union organizations of the Second International;
- Mennonite communities.

The Netherlands Red Cross had fulfilled its obligations as a member of the Nansen Committee in full by September 1922 and would later act on its own initiative. And, despite their small numbers and political impotence, the Dutch communists were able to provide real assistance, both in terms of saving the hungry and in terms of restoring the national economy.

When it comes to feeding the undernourished, the Netherlands Red Cross and the Dutch office of Save the Children International led the way, feeding approximately 30,000 people per day for an entire year at their peak. The Dutch Mennonites fed

⁴⁹ Ibid. S. 27.

⁵⁰ Ibid. S. 16.

⁵¹ State Archive of the Russian Federation. Fund R-1058. Inv. 1. C. 14. S. 16, 27.

21,000 people per day in the eastern provinces of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, as well as several thousand people in Crimea, over the course of five months. The number of people in Chuvash Autonomous Oblast who received food from Dutch trade unions through the IFTU in 1922 cannot be established. As for the activities of Workers International Relief, it set up three orphanages in Soviet Russia that were run and maintained by Dutch workers and communists throughout the year. The biggest contribution to the fight against hunger was made by the Rutgers group: the Kuzbass Autonomous Industrial Colony started to provide the country with coal in the midst of a fuel crisis, which helped speed up and improve the movement of trains carrying food and other humanitarian aid for the hungry.

It is especially important to note that aid was provided by the Dutch side even though diplomatic relations between Russia and the Netherlands were nonexistent, which, in our opinion, proves not only that the people of the two countries had a true affinity for one another, but also that people-to-people diplomacy – an effective tool in extremely difficult political environments – was alive and kicking back then.

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The author declares the absence of any conflict of interest.

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