

Conclusion "The Red Cross is watching over us"

During the Civil War in Soviet Russia there was one quintessential story about the Americans' humanitarian aid.

In May 1918, two groups of children (around 800 aged from 3 to 16) were sent from starving Petrograd to summer camps in the Urals, accompanied by teachers and guardians. They were settled near Chelyabinsk and Yekaterinburg, where they unexpectedly found themselves in a conflict zone because of the Czechoslovakian revolt and the movement of the front line to the West. The Civil War cut the children off from their friends and relatives. Autumn was approaching, they needed warm clothing, food shortages were widespread. The American Red Cross came to the rescue; working as part of the American Expeditionary Force Siberia in Russia. They fed and clothed the Soviet children and sent them to Vladivostok by railroad. The children spent almost a year there as a unified Petrograd colony under the protection of the American Red Cross, which took complete responsibility for financing their food, education and medical assistance.

After the Japanese occupied Vladivostok in the spring of 1920, the American Red Cross had to leave Russia. At the insistence of the head of the Petrograd colony and American Red Cross volunteer Riley

Allen, a decision was made not to abandon the children to the whims of fate, but to send them to Petrograd by sea. It was a ludicrous plan, but Allen was able to carry it out. He obtained enormous resources, chartered a Japanese cargo ship, the Yomei Maru, re-outfitted it as a passenger ship in a very short time, and procured everything necessary for a long sea voyage of more than 1,000 people, most of whom were children. The ship was their home for two months during their unbelievable trip by sea: Vladivostok – Japanese port of Murovan – San Francisco – Panama Canal – New York – Bordeaux (France) – Koivisto (Finland). After two and a half years of roaming, 800 children reunited with their families in Petrograd, having completed a trip around the world. From August 1919 to January 1921, the head of the colony, Colonel Riley Allen, was with the children. When he returned home to Hawaii, this generous and dedicated man was the editor-in-chief of the Honolulu Star Bulletin for many years, and participated in many humanitarian projects.

Why were the Americans ready to extend a helping hand to those who needed it in tsarist and then Soviet Russia? First of all, it was because for them this was not a question of politics, but of humanity, not an ideological struggle, but charity. Their philanthropic impulse had, of course, a pragmatic aspect, since in helping the world they were helping themselves, demonstrating their own prosperity and expanding the market for their agricultural produce, stimulating the development of the agrarian sector and receiving confirmation of their exceptionalism. This national egoism, however, did not lessen the significance of American philanthropy for those who were saved from starvation on the other side of the Atlantic, forming a common past for the peoples of two countries.

Further reading

- Baudet S.* The Long Way Home: The true story of the American Red Cross mission to rescue 800 Russian children and take them home. Independently published, 2019.
- Encyclopedia of Russian-American Relations in the 18th-20th Centuries /* Author and editor E.A. Ivanian. Moscow, 2001. [In Russ.]
- Lipovetsky V.* The Children's Ark, or the Unbelievable Odyssey: A Literary-Documentary Novel. Saint Petersburg, 2006. [In Russ.]
- Mollina O.* The Red Cross Watches Over Us: A Petersburg Family in the 20th Century. Saint Petersburg, 2007. [In Russ.]