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The American 'Postwar' Relief Mission in Wartime Poland, 1919-1923

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As the Great War (1914-1918) settled into a war of attrition, its terrific scale and intensity bound the fates of civilians and soldiers alike to the unappeasable demands of military necessity. Historians agree this was a “total war”—yet, they declare the trope devoid of any meaning.¹ As a heuristic framework, “total war” elides the myriad ways in which experiences of sacrifice and violence differed on the military front, the home front, and under the deadly weight of occupation.² It generalizes the type of national mobilization required to erase distinctions between society and military, while quests for its antecedents only further reinforce the self-serving nature of these concepts.³ Defaulting to totality conceals how the experience of such a global conflagration differed across its many fronts. Consider the experiences of 1918 on the European continent—in March, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk crowned a lull in large-scale campaigns on the Eastern Front; on the Western Front, fresh American forces joined in main battle line against the final German offensive and the Second Battle of the Marne. As a further testament to this mosaic of experiences, we can trace the ways in which the Great War crippled Europe’s nations—old and new. Its aftermath exposed unique and challenging paths to peace after the 11 November 1918 armistice.

In Western Europe, the war’s aftermath cast a long shadow.⁴ The Entente’s desire for reprisal inspired the punitive peace at Versailles in the summer of 1919 and only gradually gave

¹ Roger Chickering, “Total War: The Use and Abuse of a Concept,” in *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experience, 1871-1914*, ed. Boemeke, et. al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 16.

² As Jesse Kaufmann pithily states with regard to Poland, “It is also difficult to see what could have spared Polish civilians their hunger...Germany’s food supplies were severely disrupted by the Allied Blockade,” Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance: The German Occupation of Poland in World War I* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2015), 59. Such question also must include war crimes and genocide, as the case with Armenia. See: Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918-1924* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 2.

³ We can locate these abstractions in every modern war. David Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon’s Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2009). And by this metric even non-modern wars are total. See, again, Chickering, “Total War...”, 23.

⁴ Bruno Cabanes, *La Victoire Endeuille: la Sortie de Guerre des Soldats Francais, 1918-1920* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

way to the reconciliatory spirit of Locarno in 1924. In France, national and individual trauma fit into a “culture of demobilization.”⁵ The year 1919 also saw massive forced migrations, as the French expelled some 150,000 Germans from Alsace-Lorraine.⁶ In Germany, the humiliation of defeat left a poisonous resentment toward Germany’s neighbors and even the newly-formed Republic itself.⁷ The War’s legacy spawned revolutionary and paramilitary activity. Many right-wing German nationalists blamed the collapse of the war effort on a “stab in the back” by socialists and Jews on the home front. Others blamed the crippling effects of the British blockade.⁸

Formerly occupied lands, such as Belgium and Poland, did not have home fronts during the War; they instead acted as the battlefields and standing reserve from which Europe’s belligerent empires siphoned away food, fuel, manpower and other resources as required by their respective war machines. To the east, the tenuous détente between the Central Powers and Russia that had characterized the final months on the Eastern Front simply vanished after the armistice of 11 November 1918. The nation-building projects that emerged in the “shatterzones” of Europe’s

⁵ John Horne, “Demobilizing the Mind: France and the Legacy of the Great War, 1919-1939,” *French History and Civilization*, Volume 2 (2009). For how this process is informed by notions of gender, see: Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), Joan Tumblety, *Remaking the Male Body: Masculinity and the Uses of Physical Culture in Interwar and Vichy France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). In Britain: Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, discusses how notions of gender and class adjusted and how schemes “to improve the physique and maintain the morale” of the unemployed and those returning from war shaped national discourse. See: Bargielowska, *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health and Fitness in Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 297. For bodies in national postwar discourse in Germany, see: Heather Perry, *Recycling the Disabled: Army, Medicine, and Modernity in WWI Germany* (Manchester University Press, 2014).

⁶ Philip Ther, “Pre-negotiated Violence: Ethnic Cleansing in the ‘Long’ First World War,” in *Legacies of Violence: Eastern Europe’s First World War*, eds., Böhler, et. al. (Munich: Oldenburg Verlag, 2014): 259-284; Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878-1938* (Cambridge University Press, 2004). Questions regarding the rights of national minorities, however, are beyond the purview of this essay.

⁷ Ian Johnson, “The Fire of Revolution: A Counterfactual Analysis of the Polish-Bolshevik War, 1919 to 1920,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 28:1 (2015): 156-185; Vejas Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁸ Belidna J. Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

former belligerent empires reignited violence.⁹ The ongoing scarcity of food, fuel, and other vital resources drove ethnic, confessional, and nationalist conflict in regions with antagonistic populations and low state control. Public health concerns, starvation, and social instability continued to transcend national boundaries. Hungry and destitute refugees continued to stream across Eastern Europe's fluid borders, either out of fear or by force, carrying with them cholera, typhoid, and lice that spread typhus.¹⁰ Behind the violent outbreaks of epidemics, hunger and endemic disease continued to stalk the young and destitute as ongoing military campaigns tested the limits of consent and coercion among civilian populations.

The crisis persisted and even intensified after the Treaty of Versailles. By 1920, Britain's Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, urged the nebulous Polish state to abstain from "military adventures" and to focus on economic reconstruction.¹¹ But the eastern boundary proposed by the Allied Supreme War Council (the so-called Curzon line) reflected British interest in maintaining economic relations with Russia, not the interests of Poland's leaders or Polish public opinion.¹² Still, many international observers argued that Poland badly needed military support and material relief to withstand the military advance of the Red Army and the social appeal of communism.¹³ Herbert Hoover, head of the wartime U.S. Food Administration and the American Relief

⁹ *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the Germany, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, eds., Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (Indiana University Press, 2013).

¹⁰ Peter Gatrell, "War, Population, Displacement, and State Formation in the Russian Borderlands, 1914-1924," in *Homelands: War, Population and Statehood in Eastern Europe and Russia 1918-1924*, ed., Nick Baron and Peter Gatrell (London: 2004): 10-36.

¹¹ "Lord Curzon Advises," Folder 5, Box 369, ARA Europe, Herbert Hoover Library and Archives, Palo Alto, California (henceforth HILA).

¹² Anna M. Cienciala, "Wilsonian East Central Europe: The British View with Reference to Poland," in *Wilsonian East Central Europe*, ed., John S. Micgie (New York: Pilsudski Institute, 1995):81-112.

¹³ France in particular spoke with two voices, as the regime looked toward Britain for advice, while Marshal Foch, who had been politically sidelined, urged for military relief to Poland. France did, however, arrange for the transport of Haller's Legions to Poland. See, Johnson (above) and, Peter Wandycz, "The French Barriere de l'Est or Cordon Sanitaire," in *Wilsonian East Central Europe*: 113-122.

Administration (ARA), argued to President Wilson that conditions in Poland could lead to social and political collapse—“anarchy and bolshevism,” in his words.¹⁴

At its zenith, the Polish-Bolshevik war paled in comparison to the campaigns of 1915-1916, when millions of soldiers organized into some 20 armies unleashed absolute destruction on Eastern Europe.¹⁵ Nonetheless, the conflict hampered agricultural production, damaged the credibility of the Polish state, and bedeviled both state and international efforts at reconstruction. The consequences of sustained mobilization were written into borders and bodies alike.¹⁶ Hoover feared that these violent aftershocks would endow Europe with a second lost generation, one that had nothing to do with the excitement of 1914, but would reap the poisonous fruit of war for years to come, burdening the world with “dwarfed bodies and warped mines.”¹⁷

Here the transition to peace did not take place within a culture of demobilization. The cataclysms facing the new Poland—total economic collapse, at least three separate and internationally brokered border disputes with Germany and Czechoslovakia, the question of Danzig and access to the Sea, the war with Soviet Russia, an ongoing refugee crises, and the public

¹⁴ Herbert Hoover, *An American Epic: Famine in Forty-Five Nations, Organization Behind the Front, 1914-1923 Volume II* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1959), 239.

¹⁵ S. Ansky, *The Enemy at His Pleasure: A Journey Through the Jewish Pale of Settlement During World War I*, trans. Neugroschel (New York: Henry Holt, 2002); Joshua Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse: The Great War and the Destruction of the Russian Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁶ Michal Kopczynski, “Wpływ I Wojny Światowej na Poziom Życia W Królestwie Polskim w Świetle Miernikow Biologicznych,” *Przegląd historyczny* 92.3 (2001): 301-321. Kopczynski finds a statistically significant decrease in biological health metrics of recruits coming into the Polish army 1921-1923. On collective trauma in Poland, Brian Porter-Szücs, *Poland in the Modern World: Beyond Martyrdom* (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 70.

“...virtually everyone knew someone who perished. Everyone experienced intimate loss; we don’t need to resort to fuzzy concepts like ‘collective trauma’ because the psychological burden was carried individually by everyone.” I argue this also applies to physiological trauma carried by the members of Polish society.

¹⁷ Perhaps the most recognizable title on the legacies of conflict and violence in interwar Central and Eastern Europe, Timothy Snyder’s, *Bloodlands: Eastern Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), however, deals more with Soviet policies in Ukraine to connect the tragedy of the Holodor with that of the Holocaust than with the consequences of WWI in Poland and how state building projects interacted with the normal function of agricultural systems and intergroup relations. In a discerning review of *Bloodlands*, historian Omer Bartov asks why Snyder does not connect the Holodor back to the violent pogroms that broke out in 1919, following the upheaval and suspicion of the Great War and its aftershocks. Omer Bartov, “Review of: *Bloodlands*,” *Slavic Review* 70.2 (2011), 426.

health campaigns to assist the displaced and combat mounting epidemic and endemic disease—, however, are too enormous to address directly and are too interwoven to understand adequately in isolation. Strictly national perspectives likewise omit the significance of the unprecedented and flourishing exchange of international cooperation that characterized the postwar period.¹⁸

This paper uses the American Relief Administration’s multivalent mission to Poland, from 1919 to its final, delayed conclusion in 1923, as a lens to reveal moments where indigenous needs, national interests, and international systems converged in an effort to rein in the Four Horsemen. The ways in which ongoing conflict on Poland’s borders bedeviled efforts of humanitarian aid organizations reveals the sustained friction between military and civilian systems in the region. The significance of what got lost between these systems lies in matters of agricultural production, caloric regimes for undernourished children, collective and individual trauma, and the specter of political and social collapse. The challenges facing relief and reconstruction also highlight themes of continuity and discontinuity of experiences that lasted well beyond 1918.

Herbert Hoover had first organized relief shipments to German-occupied Belgium and devastated Northern France as early as October of 1914. His Committee to Relieve Belgium (CRB) continued its work until 1923. The activities of the CRB, the American Red Cross (ARC) and other American organizations in promoting American hygienic and civic values during this time are well documented by historians.¹⁹ But with a focus on America’s political interests, existing scholarship obscures a narrative of cooperation and the context socio-politics of starvation in Central and Eastern Europe. Cultural imperialism offers a weak explanation of international public health and

¹⁸ Paul Weindling, *International Health Organizations and Movements, 1918-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹⁹ Julia F. Irwin, *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation’s Humanitarian Awakening* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Branden Little, “Band of Crusaders: American Humanitarians, the Great War and the Remaking of the World,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 2013).

security policy at a time when new forms international humanitarian were “increasingly organized “around transnational networks.”²⁰

The vastness of the eastern front and Germany’s disregard for international law had stymied efforts to extend aid to Central and Eastern Europe until after 1918. And by 1921, the urgency of the Russian famine (as well as American isolationism) eclipsed relief work in Europe. In a thorough examination of the ARA’s Soviet mission (1921-1923), Bertrand Patenaude explains that mistrust of the American mission by the Bolshevik regime stalled the delivery of relief to the roughly 6 million people who died of starvation in the Volga region.²¹ But most scholars take for granted that famine relief in Russia relied on the transport of goods from Danzig across a shaky Eastern Europe. In Poland, the ARA acted as a partner. Congruent interests augmented by the credibility of American agents in Poland helped to make the postwar crisis in Central and Eastern Europe much tamer than the horrors of Russia.

The American Relief Administration’s European Children’s Fund

Józef Piłsudski, the former commander of the Polish Legions under the Central Powers, arrived in Warsaw one day before the armistice that ended the War. He had been imprisoned in Magdeburg since July of 1917, after refusing to swear allegiance to the German military. Germany’s collapse in November of 1918 freed Piłsudski and the Polish people from their colonial oppressors. Upon his return, Poland’s Regency Council (a German wartime creation) appointed Piłsudski as Poland’s *de facto* leader and he began to negotiate for the withdrawal of German troops. On November 16, Piłsudski announced the rebirth of a Polish state, with himself as its head and Jędrzej Moraczewski

²⁰ Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism*, 4.

²¹ Bertrand Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 83. “Bololand” here refers to the land of the Bolsheviks.

as prime minister.²² The Entente and the United States, however, recognized the Polish National Committee in Paris, created by Piłsudski's political rival, Roman Dmowski, as Poland's legitimate representative.

In January of 1919 the U.S. Congress created the American Relief Administration out of the former U.S. Food Administration and allotted the organization \$100,000,000 in credit for relief. An amendment by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge prohibited any aid from going to former enemy nations. Herbert Hoover protested to President Wilson that as it stood, Cabot's amendment would mean great difficulty in transporting food across German controlled territory. Without time to wait for President Wilson to appeal to the Senate on his behalf, Hoover began to arrange for inter-Allied support to the Austrians and the Poles, who needed finance credits in order to purchase food.²³ Harvests in 1918 had been nonexistent, and by spring it appeared that 1919 would follow suit. Hoover likewise organized children's milk shipments from Switzerland to Lwów, where pogroms and battles between the Poles and the Ukrainian Nationalist Army created dire need. This venture was funded in part by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC).²⁴

Meanwhile, in the northern part of Poland, the demobilized German army stripped the land and the population of resources as it withdrew from the new Republic of Poland. But the British insisted that provisioning Poles with food that would only find its way into German hands posed a threat to security and signing of the Peace. Negotiations with the Germans dragged on until spring while Hoover insisted that the Poles be allowed to exercise their "free access to the sea," as provisioned by Wilson's Fourteen Points.

²² Adam Dziurak, et al, *Od Niepodległości do Niepodległości: Historia Polski, 1918-1989* (Warsaw: Institute Pamięci Narodoowej, 2011), 26.

²³ Frank M. Surface and Raymond L. Bland (eds), *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period* (Stanford University Press, 1931), 146.

²⁴ Matthew Lloyd Adams, "Herbert Hoover and the Organization of the American Relief Effort in Poland (1919-1923)," *European Journal of American Studies* 2 (2009), 3.

Hoover sent Vernon Kellogg, a biologist at Stanford University and a representative of the American Relief Administration to assess conditions in Poland. Kellogg believed in humanitarianism and cooperation as the foil to the violent self-assertion that many argued fueled Germany's push to war.²⁵ Kellogg reported that Poland badly needed stability on its eastern front. He wrote that in order to succeed in "holding back the hordes of Russia," Poland needed military support—either from the Allied Powers or from the Polish volunteers currently under the direction of General Haller in France.²⁶ To combat the appeal of communist rhetoric, Kellogg reported Poland needed "food, clothing, shoes, and raw materials to put the thousands of idle workmen at work."²⁷ But without a stable government, neither the US nor Britain would concede to allow relief past the ongoing naval blockade and across territory still ostensibly under Germany control.

Poland's need for both international support and internal cohesion spurred Piłsudski to form a coalition government with Ignacy Paderewski, head of the National Committee in Paris. As Prime Minister and a skilled orator, Paderewski championed the cause of international relief for Poland in the United States. Piłsudski and Paderewski shared common goals, but the friction between their policies, part of the broader conflict between military and civil authorities in postwar Poland, complicated attempts to stabilize and feed the country. At the opening meeting of the new Legislative Sejm on February 10, Piłsudski asserted Poland's right to defend its borders.²⁸ The cost of defending the entire extent of Poland's borders with armed men greatly strained the

²⁵ Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., "Culture versus Kultur," *The New York Times*, November 8, 1914; see also, Alan Kramer, *Absolute Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 68.

²⁶ Poland only received support from the troops under Haller's command in France and were able to purchase a paltry amount of military surplus from the Entente, but despite the urging of Marshall Foch, French and British economic interests in Russia precluded any further support for Poland. See Wandycz (above).

²⁷ Hoover, *American Epic Vol. III*, 65.

²⁸ Janusz Szczepanski, *Spoleczenstwo Polski w Walce z Najazdem Bolszewickim 1920 Roku* (Warsaw: Naczelna Dyrekcja Archiwow Panstwowych, 2000), 15. In Britain, Robert Cecil and Curzon both publically criticized Piłsudski's willingness to take military action against the Bolshevik regime.

resources of the Polish state and necessitated the continuation of compulsory requisition of food and fodder for troops and horses.²⁹ Meanwhile, Paderewski and the council of ministers labored to find a way to feed Poland's population.

In addition to the issue of unsettled borders, the new Polish state faced a crisis of credibility if it could not meet the needs of its citizens. In April 1919 Prime Minister Paderewski wrote to Hoover regarding conflicts in the Duchy of Teschen, on Poland's border with Czechoslovakia. Poland's Prime Minister explained that without the authority of former German agencies, the people in the mining districts only had confidence in the "authority of American relief."³⁰ With industry at a standstill, crippled by the draconian German occupation, workers had no way to feed their families. The pattern repeated itself across Poland. In the industrial center of Łódź, city officials feared that without proper provisions, as many as 60,000 children would starve.³¹

The ARA's mission to feed Polish children began in April of 1919 and was in full force by July.³² Once Hoover secured enough food, clothing, and finance credits for countries like Austria and Poland to survive until the harvest of 1919, the ARA's charter expired. Seamlessly, the ARA shifted its focus specifically to the feeding of undernourished children as the American Relief Administration's European Children's Fund (ARAECF), a private charitable venture.³³

When Hoover's people arrived in Poland, the idea was the make use of existing local structures as much as possible to meet the second pair of objectives. As early as 1915, the German

²⁹ "Report of European Technical Advisers Mission to Poland, 1919-1922," page 59, Box 4, European Technical Advisers, HILA; "Okolnik No. 280, 23.I.1919" sygn.108, 19 Ministerstwo Apropowizacji, Archiwum Akt Nowych, Warsaw, Poland (henceforth, AAN).

³⁰ Hoover, *American Epic Vol. II*, 431.

³¹ 15597/18254, Polsko-Amerykański Komitet Pomocy Dzieciom-w Łodzi, wiadomości dwuzgodniowe, referaty, 1922, Wydział Opieki Społecznej, Akta miasta Łodzi, Archiwum Państwowe miasta Łodzi. (henceforth: ApmŁ).

³² 15597/18254, Polsko-Amerykański Komitet Pomocy Dzieciom-w Łodzi, wiadomości dwuzgodniowe, referaty, 1922, WOS, AmŁ, ApmŁ.

³³ I will continue to refer to this organization as the ARA, as opposed to the ARA ECF, as the organization, offices, and personnel remained the same.

occupation authorities had granted powers of local administration in matters of social welfare to the Poles. That same year Paderewski had made attempts with the help of the Rockefeller Foundation and Hoover's Committee to Relieve Belgium to organize a relief mission to German-occupied Poland. But initial opposition from Britain and later America's own entry into the war prohibited any substantial relief from reaching the occupied territories. Over the course of the war Poland's institutions had grown to include a division for public health. By the time the armistice was signed in November of 1918, the public health division had developed into a full-fledged ministry under Witold Chodźko.³⁴ These extant public health structures developed in Polish cities under the German occupation from 1916 onward increased Poland's ability to cooperate with the ARA and its partners.

The program in Poland broadly followed four stages. The first was to quell existing internal unrest through the distribution of relief and clothing to children and adults. The second was to ensure the financial stability of both Austria and Poland before the summer of 1919.³⁵ Hoover was able to secure financial funding to allow Austria to purchase food stuffs. Similarly, the Poles were given a loan to contribute their half of the mission. What followed was a prolonged effort to distribute relief in an effort to combat long-term social instability, and finally a program to invest in the future of Europe by continuing to feed millions of starving children.

The ARA entered into a partnership with the Polish government with the intent to make use of existing local structures as much as possible. The result was the Polish-American Children's Relief Committee (*Polsko-Amerykański Komitet Pomocy Dzieciom*, PAKPD). The feeding

³⁴ Marta Aleksandra Balińska, "The National Institute of Hygiene and Public Health in Poland, 1919-1939," *Social History of Medicine* 9:3 (1996), 428.

³⁵ William R. Grove, *Wars Aftermath: Polish Relief in 1919* (New York: House of Field, Inc, 1940), 20.

mission began on July 1, 1919.³⁶ The standard daily ration furnished by the PAKPD consisted of the following:

| | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|
| Children 3-15 years | Infants 0-3 years | |
| Flour..... 62 grams | Condensed milk.....80 grams | |
| Beans..... 35 “ | Evaporated milk.....40 “ | |
| Rice..... 20 “ | Rice.....20 “ | |
| Milk..... 22 “ | Flour.....20 “ | |
| Fats10 “ | Total | 160 grams |
| (Kosher oil for Jewish children) | | |
| Sugar..... 15 “ | | |
| Cocoa..... 3 “ | | |
| Total | | 167 grams |

The meals cost roughly two American cents, with the neediest families receiving discounted or free meals. The meals were meant to supplement “what the child might receive at home,” but in reality they were sometimes the only source of nourishment for an entire family.³⁷ Several cases were reported early in 1919, where mothers collecting food for malnourished and tubercular children were then distributing the prepared meal between several family members, to the ultimate detriment of the sick child. To remedy this issue, children were required to consume their meals on site at the kitchens. In cities like Łódź where as many as four thousand children would come through a feeding kitchen each day, this put a strain on resources. In many areas children had to bring their own utensils and containers, often taken from a parent’s wartime equipment. Later, under the coordination of the PAKPD, children were either sent to hospitals, sanatoriums, feeding kitchens, or summer colonies based on their individual needs.³⁸

The organizational structure of the PAKPD drew upon local expertise by creating in each community a committee of local elites and public health officials. At the height of its activity, the PAKPD was made up of 14 regional offices and 198 local committees and district offices. Maurice

³⁶ 15597/18254, Polsko-Amerykański Komitet Pomocy Dzieciom-w Łodzi, wiadomości dwuzgodniowe, referaty, 1922, WOS, AmL, APmL.

³⁷ “PAKPD,” 9.

³⁸ “PAKPD,” 11.

Pate, the future founder of UNICEF acted as its chief, but the entire apparatus of the PAKPD was Polish. Ongoing instability and turnover in Poland's leadership required the ARA's partners to take greater charge of supervision and oversight after 1920. In May, the ARA dispatched a group of Polish-American female volunteers to oversee relief kitchens. The *Grey Samaritans*, as they were known by their grey YWCA uniforms, performed in rural areas the same roles as nurses and public health officials in cities.

In Łódź, the PAKPD partnered with the Ministry of Health's Department for Social Welfare (*Wydział Opieki Społecznej*, or WOS) to direct relief to those most in need. With estimates that the incidence of tuberculosis in children rose over two hundred percent between 1918 and 1920, the WOS directed its efforts toward treatment as well as prevention through the distribution of food relief. The WOS coordinated both the efforts of its own organs as well as the city's self-titled "hygienic-philanthropic" organizations, namely the Tuberculosis Control Section (*Sekcja do Walki z Gruźlicą*, or SWG).³⁹ Under the WOS, which functioned as an executive authority and ARA liaison, the SWG took over the prewar work of the Antituberculosis League (*Liga Przeciwgruźlicą*) to distribute milk from the PAKPD to local feeding kitchens operated by welfare organizations like Drop of Milk (*Kropla Mleka*) throughout the city. The SWG was also in charge of keeping records of who took advantage of relief and from which of the organizations. The WOS appointed Dr. Seweryn Sterling as the director of the SWG. Born into a Jewish family, Sterling studied medicine in Warsaw and eventually settled in Łódź. In 1895 he founded the first pulmonary clinic in the Congress of Poland, and was behind the opening of the first tuberculosis outpatient clinic in Łódź in 1910.⁴⁰ At his pulmonary clinic at the Israel and Leonia Poznański Hospital, Sterling combined heliotherapy with daily rest, hygiene, and a diverse diet. In a 1922

³⁹19142, SWG, WZP, AmŁ, APmŁ, 119.

⁴⁰ 19163, Correspondence, Sekcja Światłolecznicza, SWG, WZP, AmŁ, APmŁ, 17.

report, Sterling praised the effectiveness of the Polish-American relief mission.⁴¹

But in the areas east of Warsaw that had been ravaged by successive invasions, no public health infrastructure remained. In areas near Brest-Litovsk and Mińsk, therefore, relief was carried out almost entirely through the church or by charitable groups, namely the Society of Friends (Quakers). And In a memoir of their travels across Poland, Quakers Sydney Loch and Joice M. Nankivell described how in the chaos of the Bolshevik retreat, only the peasants recognized other villagers. Quakers relied on locals to determine who had, for instance, passed babies along to collect more aid, or to assess whether a wealthier member of the community was trying to collect more relief than was necessary.⁴² Where people lived in dugouts and cisterns, the infrastructure simply did not exist to implement any organized relief beyond hand-to-hand interaction.

The American Friends' Service Committee

The American Friends' Service Committee (AFSC) began its humanitarian work in France in 1917.⁴³ The AFSC debated whether its wartime committee should disband after the war, but in spring of 1919 Hoover proposed that the Society of Friends (Quakers) lead a charitable mission to Germany, where the American Relief Administration could not officially operate at the time. The British and American Friends coordinated their efforts with the ARA across Central Europe, feeding children and providing clothing furnished by the warehouses of the ARA European

⁴¹ 15597/18254, Polsko-Amerykański Komitet Pomocy Dzieciom-w Łodzi, wiadomości dwuzgodniowe, referaty, 1922, WOS, AmŁ, APmŁ. Sterling's Austrian contemporary, Clemens Pirquet, similarly describes the impact of the American relief mission: "With these additional meals [the children studied] began to grow again...and if we are able to continue having them fed they will reach normal size [for their age] just in time before puberty is reached and the ability to grow diminishes rapidly." Clemens Pirquet, *An Outline of the Pirquet System of Nutrition* (Philadelphia: WB Saunders Company, 1922), 63.

⁴² Joice M. Nankivell and Sydney Loch, *The River of a Hundred Ways: Life in the War-Devastated Areas of Eastern Poland* (G. Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1924), 194.

⁴³ The British Friends' War Victims Relief Fund began work in Belgium and France in September of 1914, whereas the AFSC joined the effort in 1917, upon America's entry into the war.

Children's Fund in Germany, Austria, and Poland. The ARA acted as the Friends' purchasing agent and arranged free transport of supplies from ARA warehouses in Europe to points of distribution.⁴⁴ The Friends began work according to their organizational models deployed in the field in France, "with such modifications as the differing circumstances required." The mission expected to conclude in as little as five months, but by the middle of the next spring it had grown to include "[r]elief and [m]edical work...[a]gricultural and [b]uilding...anti-typhus work...and [c]hild [w]elfare and feeding."⁴⁵

In August of 1919, a contingent of British Friends led by Ruth Fry, the General Secretary of the British Friends' Relief Commission, accompanied by an American Friend, Dorothy Good, travelled to Zawiercie, Poland. The small factory town of about 30,000 north-west of Kraków was the first site of the Friends' work in Poland. A note from the Polish bacteriologist, Dr. Ludwick Rajchmann, who formed the League of Nations Health Organization in 1921, introduced the mission to the local unit of Poland's Head Provisioning Council (*Rada Główna Opiekuńcza*, RGO). By springtime, the Zawiercie mission received additional help from two volunteers from the YWCA. The Polish-American *Grey Samaritans* helped oversee the distribution of linen and other medical supplies to the local hospital. The Zawiercie unit also maintained regular correspondence with Colonel Gilchrist, a former ARA agent who in 1920 began work as head of the League of Nation's campaign against typhus.

In September and October of 1919, the Friends' unit operating in Zawiercie, dispatched another group of investigators further east to assess where to extend the organization's relief efforts. Gertrude Powicke, Reynolds Ball, and Sydney Wallis made their way across East Galicia

⁴⁴ "Dec. 26, 1919," General Administration, Foreign Service 1919, American Friends' Service Committee Archives, Philadelphia, PA (henceforth AFSC).

⁴⁵ "General Meeting of the Polish Unit, March 1st, 1920," Folder: Reports (Jan-June), General Administration, Foreign Service, Country-Poland, 1920 AFSC.

and Western Ukraine. Because railway transport was unreliable (the only train that ran regularly through the region, via Lublin, Chełm, and Hrubieszów travelled once per day and took about sixteen hours), the crew traveled as much as possibly by car. The observers noted the primary cause for distress stemmed from the droves of refugees returning from the east, those who fled the Polish-Bolshevik conflict. Fear of cross contamination of typhus between civilian and military populations behind the active front meant that civilians were banned from hospitals, leaving “the vast majority of the sick were crowded with those who were well” in private residences. Wallis’ partners, Powicke and Ball, perished during their journey. Both succumbed to the typhus epidemic. Wallis wrote back to the Friends’ Executive Committee that an extension of work to the Hrubieszów district, with local headquarters in the village of Werbkowice, “was deemed practicable and advisable.”⁴⁶

The “front line” in the battle against Poland’s typhus epidemic reached as far west as the industrial districts of Silesia, near the German border. A report from April 1920 clearly illustrates the nature of the Friends’ activities in Będzin. Alongside the distribution of ARA food to 350 needy children, the Friends’ conducted a vigorous delousing campaign, which the report described as follows:

It might appear to an unsympathetic eye that a hostile army accompanied by a flood had passed through [Będzin]...Each leader takes addresses of houses...All the occupants with their clothes and bedding go off to the baths to be washed and sterilized—sometimes a policeman is called in to see that all go. When the humans and the clothes have been got rid of, the spraying party attacks in force—beds are pulled to pieces...taken into the yard or street and burned...the verminous den is left sweet and clean.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ “Report of Visit of Investigation to East Galicia and West Ukraina,” Folder: General, General Administration, Foreign Service, Country-Poland, 1919, AFSC.

⁴⁷ “21-4-20,” Folder: Reports (Jan. June), General Administration, Foreign Service, Country-Poland, 1920, AFSC.

These and other public health measures often resembled the arbitrariness of military rule and evoked strong opposition from local populations; another report recounts that every person travelling by train required a note from a doctor to indicate they were fit for travel.

Back east in Werbkowice, the extension of the Friends' work grappled the multivalent nature of humanitarian work amid the ongoing war. Especially along the Polish-Bolshevik front, the AFSC's battle against typhus required coordination with military authorities and included an added layer of urgency with regard to agricultural reconstruction, the distribution of seed, and fodder. Across the entire Hrubieszow district, the AFSC oversaw the distribution of ARA food in three kitchens across nine villages in the region, supplying food to the poorest and those returning from the east. Added to this was the acquisition of forty-three horses to help "nearly 200 families...with their ploughing." The Friends observed:

the ground has not been turned over for four years, and for the strongest horses it is a struggle all the time...at best the horses are only able to plough about an acre in a long day, but it is good to think that each week a hundred acres that would otherwise be untouched are coming anew under cultivation.⁴⁸

Unlike the AFSC's mission to France, the mission in Poland relied more heavily on horses than it did tractors for several reasons. The state of agricultural reform in Poland proceeded slowly after the war and did not make major strides until the interwar period. This meant that many small holders who maintained checkerboard plots had no use for tractors. The fuel shortage in Poland also made the use of tractors unreliable, depending on which models could run various grades of benzene or kerosene. Added to this, the Polish military actually conceded to schemes whereby

⁴⁸ "Agricultural Relief, 10.5.1920," Folder: Reports (Jan. June), General Administration, Foreign Service, Country-Poland, 1920, AFSC.

landowners could rent or stable horses. And of the 56 tractors obtained and dispatched by the Friends' in eastern Poland, the Red Army captured 25 during its advance in July of 1920.⁴⁹

Unlike Western Europe, where high state involvement and familiarity with modern agriculture stimulated adoption of American methods, the Friends' in Eastern Poland saw limited possibilities to deploy American models and equipment. The Polish farmer first had to be instructed; the Friends suggested implementation of American-style agricultural education. The greatest challenge was the relatively abysmal state agricultural education across former Russian Poland. Between some eight schools operated by the Central Agricultural Association, a total of 400 pupils had received instruction prior to the war. From what observers could gather, there had been also "no attempt to teach agricultural methods even in the most rudimentary fashion in the ordinary elementary schools."⁵⁰ In the first year after the war, the same eight schools only counted 197 pupils. By comparison, former Austrian Galicia maintained some thirty agricultural schools. But even there, Friends estimated only 300 pupils had completed the three years of agricultural instruction available to them. The Quakers noted that Central Agricultural Association in Poland lacked technical material for instruction, chalkboards, chalk, and requested assistance in these matters from the American Technical Advisor's Mission (discussed below).

Even with conscious attention to local needs and conditions, some of the Friends' methods simply proved incongruent with the pace of agricultural reform in the newly formed Polish state. One major issue was that especially in the eastern borderlands—the *Kresy*—peasants had seen the regime change many, many times as armies swept back and forth across the land. Some refused to distinguish the current Polish government from the German-created Regency Council that had first

⁴⁹ "Report on Agricultural Work at Werbkowice for the Month of June, 1920," Folder: Reports (July-Dec.), General Administration, Foreign Service, Country-Poland, 1920, AFSC.

⁵⁰ "Agricultural Relief, 10.5.1920," Folder: Reports (Jan. June), General Administration, Foreign Service, Country-Poland, 1920, AFSC. Not to mention that up to 1/3 of Polish children were unable to attend school 1914-1920.

recognized Piłsudski as Poland's leader. Many simply refused to acknowledge any civic duty to the Polish state and viewed loans offered for the purposes of agricultural reconstruction with suspicion.⁵¹ The Polish government's greatest handicap appeared to be a lack of money and a severe devaluation of currency. Without the possibility of securing revenue, the state had to continuously print more money. Thus, even the equivalent of \$10,000 U.S. dollars to fund agricultural schools seemed hopelessly out of reach.

Work proceeded slowly, but the Friends' saw hope and believed that the crisis facing all of Eastern Europe could only be mitigated by empowering individual producers. A report circulated between Friends' headquarters in Philadelphia and London maintained that although the peasants in the village of Werbokwice were "...only a few," the nature of work done by the AFSC "represents a very definite attempt to cope in one small area with the food problem that faces the world." Such was "the only satisfactory solution to this problem."⁵²

Urgent efforts on the part of relief agencies and the Polish state sometimes missed the nuances of Poland's rural politics. The avenues of agricultural education and organization deployed, some argued, favored only landowners. An appeal to the Polish Sejm in April of 1920 from Tarnów in Lesser Poland complained that despite support for rural producers and the needs of destitute city-dwellers, the government neglected the needs of the landless rural population, who were left without access to the relief afforded cities, but could also not produce for themselves. The work of the Friends' also attracted criticism from the Bishop of Lublin, who accused the mission of exacerbating local confessional divisions.⁵³ These claims, however, appear largely

⁵¹ 6.15/4/1919, Presidium Rady Ministrow (8), AAN.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ The ARA's mission, however, was explicitly committed to providing relief without regard to confessional differences and coordinated with the efforts of the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in these same regions –this story will appear in my dissertation, "Reining in the Four Horsemen: Starvation, Disease, and American Relief to Central Europe, 1915-1923."

groundless, as the Friends' were prohibited both in France and in Central Europe from proselytizing. The Bishop's complains appear to stem from interpersonal conflicts caused by an AFSC agent, Dr. Goudiss, who was removed from his service in 1920.⁵⁴

ARA Technical Advisor's Mission

The logistical challenges of relief in spring and summer 1919 quickly revealed that the new Polish government faced both technical and economic problems of a novel character. In June of 1919 the ARA dispatched a team of technical advisers to work alongside Polish ministries as independent agents. The advisers received payment from Polish funds, and ostensibly worked as agents of the Polish government while they coordinated the logistics of food, fuel, and raw materials with a network of ARA affiliated experts in Paris, Prague, and Vienna—in addition to the ARA's Warsaw office. In July, Hoover received permission from Paderewski to appoint a food adviser to work alongside the ministries of provisioning and social welfare, along with a transport adviser to work with the minister of transport.⁵⁵ In reality, these advisers appointed to Poland—Colonels Barber and Durand—advised the government on a range of matters from economic policy to logistics.

Hoover had intended the European Children's Fund and Technical Adviser's Mission to last only one year, but the intensification of conflict on all of Poland's borders in the year after the 1919 Treaty of Versailles prompted the Polish government to request an extension of the American missions.⁵⁶ The contradiction among Poland's allies between international support for self-determination and the desire to allow Russia to retain its territorial integrity left Poland's eastern

⁵⁴ Lyndon S. Back, "The Quaker Mission in Poland: Relief, Reconstruction, and Religion," *Quaker History* 101:2 (2012): 12.

⁵⁵ "Zakupy i transport amerykańskiej żywności..." 987, Archiwum I.J. Paderewskiego, AAN.

⁵⁶ Skulski to Colonel A.B. Barber, May 14, 1920, in Barber's Report of Polish Mission, 1919-1922, Box 4, European Technical Advisers, HILA.

border undefined, while the demobilization of Germany's *OberOst* created the stage for conflict. Poland's ongoing mobilization intensified the need for the Polish government to import and requisition grain to feed the military and civilian populations. In September of 1919 the Minister of Military Affairs issued a proclamation to farmers, which drew attention to both the military's need for fodder grains to feed their horses and the civic duty of Poland's agricultural classes to cooperate with timely and efficient requisition of oats and barley.⁵⁷ Despite attempts by the Ministry of Provisions to channel all purchases and requisitions through a central purchasing agency, continued requisitions by the army damaged state relations with the Polish agricultural classes and revealed internal fissures. Owing in part to these difficulties, Paderewski had resigned at the end of 1919. His successor, Leopold Skulski, wrote to Hoover and Colonel Barber to request that the American mission stay another year before he, too, resigned.⁵⁸

As fighting intensified on Poland's nebulous eastern border, desperate detachments of Polish as well as Bolshevik troops began to requisition food and supplies from ARA kitchens and storehouses. In January 1920, W.P. Fuller, the head of the ARA's Polish mission appealed to the Polish minister of military affairs to enforce cooperation with the grain purchase corporation and prevent further illegal requisition. In June, the Polish military targeted ARA warehouses in Białystok and as far west as Warsaw for requisition.⁵⁹ By summer, the rapid Bolshevik advance threatened the entire American operation in Poland's eastern borderlands. In July, Fuller called for the evacuation of ARA feeding stations and supply warehouses from their headquarters in Lwow and Warsaw to Krakow.⁶⁰ He cabled to the port office at Danzig that all shipments into Poland on

⁵⁷ Sygn. 107, 19 Ministerstwo Apropowizacji, AAN.

⁵⁸ "Report of European Technical Advisers Mission to Poland, 1919-1922," page 59, Box 4, European Technical Advisers, HILA.

⁵⁹ Barber to the Chief of the General Staff, June 24, 1920, I.301.10.38, Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe, Warsaw.

⁶⁰ Fuller, Box 700, ARA Europe, HILA.

behalf of the European Children's Fund should be halted, as reports indicated that the encroaching Bolshevik army was strong enough to come as far as it wanted. In August, representatives of the ARA met with Soviet delegates in Minsk to allow for the continued distribution of relief behind the Bolshevik front.

But the Bolshevik army proved weaker than the Poles and the ARA had feared. The battle of Warsaw saw the Red army pushed back from the banks of the Vistula. While competition for resources between the military and civilian authorities often stalled relief and revealed Poland's internal fissures, the aftermath of the Polish-Bolshevik war necessitated even greater international efforts and an extension of the American mission by yet another year. The ongoing work of the League's Typhus expedition, which had already been in operation since 1919, was not enough to deal with the new wave of refugees and the resurgent typhus epidemic after 1920. In 1921, the ARA assisted the work of the League's typhus mission by partnering with the American Red Cross and the AFSC to coordinate food and medical relief to children and refugees in the eastern borderlands.⁶¹ The destruction caused by ongoing warfare for nearly six years spurred the ARA to work out a plan with Poland's minister of public health, Witold Chodźko to continue feeding children across Poland into 1923, even though ARA's funds had been exhausted for a second time.⁶² This time, however, with the harvest of 1922 finally able to cover the needs of the population, the Polish government expected to take over the child feeding campaign by the spring of 1923.

The conclusion of the Polish-Bolshevik War in October 1920 temporarily settled Poland's eastern boundary well beyond the Curzon line, but did not bring an end to the conflict on Poland's

⁶¹ "Memorandum of Meeting between Representatives of American Relief Administration European Children's Fund and American Red Cross," February 2, 1921, Box 47, European Technical Advisers, HILA.

⁶² "Protokol 41-go posiedzenia Rady Ministrow Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z 27 marca 1922 r., 17, 8 Prezydium Rady Ministrow, AAN.

other borders. In early 1921, just before the settlement of the Upper Silesian plebiscite in March, Colonel Barber arrived in present-day Opole to arrange for the transport of coal to Vienna, where a lack of fuel threatened to cripple social functioning. Barber argued that Central Europe's coal famine resulted from the continued violent struggle for the rearrangement of borders and the decreased standard of living in mining districts of Upper Silesia. In addition to the challenges caused by the destruction of equipment and the loss of organization and skill due to the Great War, the ongoing and often armed conflict in the contested region continued to plague its residents with mental and physical distress. What Barber and Durand referred to in their reports as "demoralized productivity" was essentially the result of trauma and food shortage.⁶³ Additionally, insurgents on both the German and Polish side created impasses that prevented the normal function of railway service.

Poland's ministers often appealed to Barber and Durand to help facilitate the shipment of food to contested and economically devastated regions. In Teschen, a coal mining region fought over between the Poles and the Czechs, Polish political activists used American food explicitly as propaganda. A pamphlet titled "I also want to belong to Poland" (*Ja też chce należeć do Polski*), adduced Poland's position as the entryway for American relief as evidence of its advantageous position, and went as far as to claim that with the help of the United States, Poland would even become the America of Central Europe.⁶⁴ Ultimately, the conflicts in Upper Silesia and Teschen took the intervention of Poland's allies and the League of Nations to settle. But even once these regions began to produce coal again the interruption of regular trade, tariff wars, and the logistics

⁶³ "Economic Conditions," Box 47, European Technical Advisers, Hoover Institution Archives, Palo Alto, CA.

⁶⁴ "Ja też chce należec do Polski," February 1920, I.371.5/A.21, CAW, Warsaw.

of transport across new and contested borders, and the flight of foreign capital from Easter Europe presented an entirely separate level of difficulty.⁶⁵

Conclusion

Although a Polish state returned to the map of Europe in 1918 after a 123 year absence, it did not do so with a triumphant gleam. The fledgling nation was geographically nebulous and its society riven with fissures. An examination of the work done by the ARA and its partners within the context of postwar Poland's struggle to achieve internal stability and secure its borders reveals that American relief was a tool deployed by Poland's civil authorities and coveted by its military at a time when the movement of grain and milk was as crucial to Poland's future as movement of troops.⁶⁶

In his concluding report, Barber wrote that American food contributed to feeding about 20% of Poland's population over a period of three years, which stated another way, amounted to "one ton per year for every hundred of the total population."⁶⁷ The PAKPD alone, at the peak of its activity, fed up to 1.3 million children a day. The American mission helped stave off the threat of massive starvation and paved the way for the Polish government to cooperate with international agencies like the Friends' Service Committee and later the Rockefeller Foundation. The perception of ARA's mission as a representative example of American soft-power interventionism or interwar humanitarianism, whereby the United States was able to influence geopolitical stability or civic values, flattens the complexity facing Central and Eastern Europe.

⁶⁵ My broader project connects the work of Poland's technical advisors with those operating in Vienna, as well.

⁶⁶ Reflecting upon the legacy of the postwar cooperation between America and Poland, Hoover wrote that Poland had "secured entirely too many fringe groups of Germans, Ruthenians, and Lithuanians" for its own good. Furthermore, an ongoing currency crisis, lack of foreign capital, and fear of border revisions, especially after the Locarno treaties of 1925, left Poland isolated; Hoover, *American Epic Volume III*, 67.

⁶⁷ "Report of European Technical Advisers Mission to Poland, 1919-1922," Box 4, European Technical Advisers, Hoover Institution, Palo Alto, CA.

The relative success of the ARA's mission in Central Europe also hinged on more than just the congruency of political interests between American agents and their beneficiaries. Local conditions and the nature of the land under cultivation set the parameters within which both the Polish state and relief agencies operated. Though informed by their earlier efforts in France and Belgium, aid workers arriving in Eastern Europe in 1919 quickly realized they could not do for the Polish peasant what had been done for French farmer.