
Evidence of Colonel Raymond Robins

Source: *Current History (1916-1940)*, April, 1919, Vol. 10, No. 1, Part I (April, 1919), pp. 134-139

Published by: University of California Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45328788>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



University of California Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Current History (1916-1940)*

JSTOR

Russia from June, 1917, until the latter part of January, 1918. She had visited Petrograd, Moscow, and other cities; she had known Trotzky and Lenine personally, and for about two weeks she had barracked with the Russian Women's Regiment that was known as the Battalion of Death. Miss Beatty stated that she did not believe that the Soviet Government had attempted to nationalize women. She had been at the Smolny Institute, she said, when the marriage decree was debated; by this decree couples who wished to be married went before the Marriage Commission; a divorce could be obtained by merely appearing before this commission and announcing that the marriage relation was no longer desired.

She disclaimed any intention to defend Bolshevism, but said that she thought that the Russians should be allowed to work out their problems without outside interference. Senator Nelson asked her what exactly the Bolsheviks were attempting to do.

"Their program," she said, "is for the socialization of land and industry and the promotion of peace. That is their plan in a nutshell. Their idea is to take the earning power out of money. Money they consider stored capital. In other words, in Russia the rule is that a person cannot use his money to make more money. He can spend it any way he wants, but he can't put it to earn more money. For instance, he cannot loan it out at interest."

"That is, if a man has a friend who needs money to equip his farm that man

cannot loan his friend the money needed for that legitimate purpose?"

"No, as I understand it, he cannot loan the money to him. The plan in Russia is to bring everybody to the same level. That is, lower the upper 10 per cent. and raise the lower 90 per cent. of the population."

Another witness called was Frank Keadie, a London tea expert, who went to Russia in 1916 and left there in October, 1918. He was the most outspoken defender of the Lenine-Trotzky régime who had yet appeared before the committee. He had been in Petrograd and Moscow in January and February, 1918, and after that in Omsk; he had also visited some forty villages, and considered himself qualified to express the viewpoint of the peasant farmers. The agricultural policy of the Bolsheviks, he stated, was, in his opinion, a success. The witness denounced the Allies for sending troops to Russia, and continued as follows:

I regard Russia as the one creative experiment that has developed out of this war. They are trying to create a new social order. It is an experiment and may fail, but let us get the truth. The Allies have made a steel ring around the Bolsheviks with the Czechoslovaks, the Americans, the British, the Japanese, and the French. * * * The Russian people should be permitted to settle their own affairs. America has a Monroe Doctrine and why should not Russia also have a Monroe Doctrine against the intervention of outsiders in her affairs?

The evidence of Colonel Raymond Robins, who was the next to testify, follows under a separate heading.

Evidence of Colonel Raymond Robins

COLONEL RAYMOND ROBINS, who was head of the American Red Cross Mission sent to Russia immediately after the overthrow of the Czar, and who remained in Russia in that capacity until June, 1918, appeared before the Senate Committee on March 6. Every pro-Bolshevist witness who had come before the committee had asked that Colonel Robins be called to tell the truth, as they said, about conditions in Russia under Trotzky and

Lenine. These witnesses had pictured Colonel Robins as a defender of the Bolsheviks and as the one man in all America who was absolutely trusted by Lenine and the other leaders of the Soviet Government.

Colonel Robins did say some kind words for the Bolsheviks, but he denounced the movement as a menace to the whole world, and said that any man who agitated for the overthrow of the Government of the United States should

be arrested, tried, and jailed. Lenin himself had told him, Colonel Robins said, that one of the ambitions of the Bolsheviks was the overthrow of the American form of government and the substitution for it of the rule of the proletariat along lines such as prevail in Russia.

A large part of the evidence given by Colonel Robins took the form of a narrative of his personal experiences and activities in Russia after the March (1917) revolution. Assigned to take charge of food supply and the caring for refugees, Colonel Robins came into personal contact with Kerensky, General Korniloff, and, later, Lenin and Trotzky. Under Kerensky extensive plans to solve the food question were made. A banker and shipowner of peasant origin named Battalin was to have been appointed by Kerensky to work with an American assistant, in conjunction with Mr. Hoover, but Battalin was never appointed, and the whole project fell through. With the slaying of Korniloff, said Colonel Robins, Kerensky had absolutely nothing to do. As to the rise of the Bolsheviks, the witness stated that the army was deliberately disorganized by two groups of agitators, one of German origin, the other composed of the Bolsheviks. Another cause of disintegration, thought the witness, was the unexpected effect of the allied propaganda. Exaggerated statements of accomplishment made the soldiers say, "If things are going so well, we will go home."

To combat this evil effect of the allied propaganda Colonel Robins worked shoulder to shoulder with his commanding officer in Russia, Colonel William B. Thompson, who contributed \$1,000,000 out of his own pocket to send literature into the peasant villages, drilling home the German peril and the truth of America's friendship for the Russian people in their hour of need.

Eight hundred Russian propagandists for this work were taken on. More money being needed, an appeal was sent to the Washington Government; its reply was to turn the matter over to the Committee on Public Information, which sent Edgar Sisson to Russia for investigation. Regarding the much-disputed

Sisson documents, Colonel Robins declined to commit himself at the present time.

RELATIONS WITH LENINE

All efforts made by Colonel Robins and Colonel Thompson, in conference with the allied representatives, to bridge the differences between the Kerensky Government and the Soviet having proved unavailing, the Bolsheviks gained control. Undeterred by previous speeches he had made denouncing Bolshevism, Colonel Robins went to see Trotzky to find out what he could do to aid the Allies and to protect the supplies at hand. He told Trotzky frankly, he stated, that he was opposed to his program as far as he knew it, and that he came to see him only because he was in power; he then exposed the object of his visit, with the result that the food supplies in question went through to their destination intact. The witness continued:

I saw Lenin several times during this period. Trotzky and Lenin both admitted that their program was worldwide, and that some day they expected to gain control of America. However, Russia was in a bad way for economic leadership and they were willing to let us help. They told me if the United States would send these economic experts to help out that we, the United States, would get ahead of Germany, and in the meantime they added, "We will be able to feed Russia." Bread was the only thing they feared. (There was Germany with economic mind, there was Mirbach head of their economic machine, and the United States was the only nation then in a position to frustrate the German plans. Trotzky said to me:

"You are interested in Russia not shipping raw materials into Germany."

"Yes."

"Well, then," he replied, "you can use your allied office to enforce the embargo which is still in effect against Germany."

I told him I did not understand him. I was suspicious. He replied that Russia needed manufactured materials and we alone could supply them. It was purely a selfish proposition on his part and to get what he needed he was willing to concede control of the embargo.

"Germany," Trotzky continued, "is going to have a conference with us at Brest-Litovsk. We shall prolong that conference and use the time to stir up trouble in Germany and thereby force a peace of no indemnities and no annexations. And after we finish with Ger-

many we will stir up England and France and then America, and compel them, too, to come into the conference and talk peace with us. I shall never sign anything but a democratic peace," Trotzky added.

And, as a matter of fact, Trotzky never did sign the Brest-Litovsk treaty. At that time I thought I understood this extraordinary young Jew, 38 years old, highly educated, and the greatest stump speaker in all Russia. But he has the weakness of the prima donna. In hours of success he is elated and defiant and in hours of defeat depressed and moody.

I have never seen such extreme ego and arrogance as is the case with Trotzky. I knew that he would prolong that conference as long as he possibly could because it afforded the greatest opportunity his ego had ever known. He knew that so long as it lasted he would be the centre of the world's attention. Trotzky said to me that he knew that Germany could never make a democratic peace, for such a peace, he said, could mean but one thing, and that was the end of the militarist class.

LOSS OF RUSSIAN GUNS

A proposition made by Trotzky to enlist the aid of the American Railway Commission at Nagasaki to get the Russian guns away from the front over the Trans-Siberian Railway ultimately failed, and these guns fell into the hands of the Germans.

After the gun incident, [said the witness,] there came a time when it was believed that any association with the Bolsheviks was wrong and an order came from the Government telling me to cease dealing with them. I showed the order to Ambassador Francis and he disapproved it and told me to continue, and I did, and until I left Russia I was the unofficial medium through whom Mr. Francis had his communications with the Soviet Government. On one occasion I may state that Ambassador Francis instructed me to inform the Bolsheviks what measures he would recommend in the event of hostilities.

Colonel Robins also told of the mission to Russia of R. H. Bruce-Lockhart, who was sent by Lloyd George to see and consult with Colonel Robins about the situation there. Lockhart, Dr. Harold Williams, the newspaper correspondent, and Mr. Stephens, head of the National City Bank Branch in Petrograd, all came to view the conditions with Colonel Robins's eyes. The witness told of a proposition that he and Bruce-Lockhart

had submitted to Lenin to get Russia back into the war. He said:

This was in March, 1918, before the ratification of the Brest-Litovsk treaty, when I told Lenin that the Allies might consider aiding the Soviet in return for a repudiation of the treaty and for active co-operation in a military way against Germany. I asked him to postpone the meeting of the all-Russian Soviet until the Ambassadors of the Allies could communicate the proposition to their Governments, and, as a matter of fact, the meeting was postponed for two days. Lenin came to Moscow and informed me that the Allies had refused to sanction the proposition.

With the ratification of the treaty my relationship with the Soviet changed. I realized then that we could not recognize them even as a *de facto* Government. But we continued to do what we could to save the situation even at that late day. I worked constantly under the direction of Mr. Francis, and finally I was asked to transmit a request through Mr. Francis asking permission for a Russian economic mission to visit the United States. So far as I know the request transmitted by the Ambassador was not even answered.

REPUDIATION OF DEBTS

Colonel Robins said that when the Bolsheviks issued the decree repudiating the Russian national debt he went to Trotzky and denounced the act, which was directed not so much against the United States and Great Britain as against France. Lenin said it was issued because of the refusal of the Allies to co-operate with the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks would probably have been willing to make an arrangement for settling with England and America, but were bitter against France, arguing that "French loans had for forty years kept Russian autocracy in power."

Colonel Robins told how Elihu Root, head of the Russian Mission, had been stabbed in the back by editorials written in this country and translated into Russian by German agents--editorials which pictured Mr. Root as "the jackal of Wall Street," the tool of interests, and thoroughly against the people in every way. These editorials, written originally by a man perhaps the most gifted in his particular line in the world, combined with cartoons conveying the same idea, impressed the poor Russian deeply,

with the inevitable result. Similar distorted views of America, he said, were disseminated by the return to Russia of agitators from this country, some Gentiles, others Jews. But neither Lenine nor Trotzky, in his opinion, had ever been "conscious German agents." An Under Secretary of Foreign Affairs named Zolkan, proved to be pro-German and anti-American, had been dismissed by Lenine. When the Germans menaced Petrograd, furthermore, \$180,000,000 in gold and specie had been sent to South Russia for safety and had been captured by the Czechoslovaks. Nevertheless, Colonel Robins denounced Bolshevism as "the greatest menace now facing the world."

In his concluding testimony, given on March 7, though referring to Bolshevism as "the beast," the witness maintained that the Russians should be left to settle the thing their own way. He opposed allied intervention. At times Colonel Robins defended the Bolsheviks to the extent of expressing a disbelief in the stories of atrocities told by other witnesses, some of them Federal officers who left Russia months subsequent to Colonel Robins's departure.

At one point Colonel Robins denounced atrocities which he believed had been committed by the Czechoslovaks. He said that these troops had captured villages and then lined the people up against the wall and shot them down in cold blood, without even the formality of trial. When Senator Nelson asked Colonel Robins what the nature of his "mission" in this country was at the present time, Colonel Robins indignantly denied that he was engaged in any support of any kind for Bolshevism here or elsewhere.

PEASANTS AND LAND

Testifying as to the contentment of the Russian peasant class under Soviet rule, the witness said it was only reasonable to suppose, since the peasants for the first time enjoyed the fruits of the land without having to pay rent, that they would defend the Soviet which had given them that land. He scouted the suggestion that the Bolsheviks repre-

sented a centralized oligarchy, explaining that every decree must be ratified by the All-Russian Soviet and the Executive Committee, the last named the body that elects the Commissaires. As to the charge that Lenine and Trotzky represented a dictatorship, he said:

In a talk I had with Lenine I remarked that many considered him a dictator who was retaining control by force. He replied that under existing conditions it was necessary to use force to an extent, and added that he was a dictator for the reason, as he put it, "that I have behind me the mass will of the people." The moment he lost that support, Lenine said, he realized his power would be gone. When the people cease to support Lenine and Trotzky they will be driven from power. The theory of the Soviet Government is that every three months the All-Russian Soviet must meet and pass on the decrees of the Commissaires. So if a majority against Lenine and Trotzky should be in the All-Russian Soviet that majority would elect other leaders. This is one way to change the Government. The other way is by force, and there are 12,000,000 rifles in Russia and machine guns, too.

Asked if he had been into the Russian villages and seen these rifles and machine guns, he replied that there had been rifles in towns that he had visited, but that he knew that counter-revolts had been repelled by the local populations, and not by rifles sent from Petrograd and Moscow. He had no knowledge of the truth of the report that many Russians would have joined the forces of the Czechoslovaks if they had had guns and ammunition. The witness made it clear that he believed neither in recognition of the Soviet Government nor in intervention, but that he thought the actual conditions under the Bolshevik régime should be thoroughly investigated by a special commission. It was necessary, he said, first to know the disease before seeking to apply the cure. Intervention had strengthened Bolshevism in Russia. He was opposed to the use of troops based upon a false judgment of the facts.

BOLSHEVISM A DISEASE

Questioned about the allegations of treacherous attacks upon the Czechoslovaks by the Bolsheviks, he replied:

I refuse now and for all time to be placed in the position of defending mur-

der, violence, or the commission of other atrocious acts. Here in America I have found a bitter resentment against the revolutionary Government in Russia, a resentment much more bitter than was that entertained here against Black Mondays under the Czar. I find the atrocities of the Bolsheviks denounced more bitterly than are the atrocities that were committed by the Czechoslovaks when they took whole villages and stood the people up and shot them down without trial. This form of resentment won't answer the challenge of Bolshevism.

Asked again if he considered Bolshevism a menace to the whole world, he reiterated his belief as follows:

The menace of the age. The question of recognition does not rest on the character of a Government. Whether or not it is the Government of a people is the only question for a foreign Government to decide. I am opposed to blinding ourselves as to actual conditions in Russia. My whole contention is that we are dealing with a disease, and that we should try and find out what the disease is.

RUSSIAN WITNESS HEARD

Colonel Robins was followed by Gregory A. Martiushin, who was Vice President of the first All-Russian Soviet and is now in this country as a commercial representative of the anti-Bolshevist Government of Northern Russia. He left Russia six months after Colonel Robins did. In practically every instance he differed with Colonel Robins as to the state of affairs in Russia, and declared that far from supporting Bolshevism the great mass of peasant Russia was sick and tired of Bolshevism and praying for its downfall and the institution of a constitutional Government patterned after the Government of this country.

Mr. Martiushin had left Russia on Nov. 2, 1918. In answer to questions by Senator Nelson, he said that he was the son of a peasant and the grandson of a serf. In the first All-Russian Soviet, of which he was the Vice President, he was delegate of the peasants of the Province of Kazan. Under the Czar he was twice exiled, on each occasion for a period of five years. At the time of the Bolshevik revolution he was an executive officer of the Central Committee of the Co-operative Organizations of Russia. There are, or were, he said, 45,000 of these co-operative societies with a total peasant

membership of about 20,000,000. Mr. Martiushin also participated in the Archangel revolt, which overthrew the Bolsheviks and established the anti-Bolshevist Government of Northern Russia.

In answer to questions as to the atrocities committed by the Bolsheviks, Mr. Martiushin said it was impossible to give the number of persons who had been murdered. He named many of his friends who had been killed, and gave the places where they were killed and the dates. One of the men starved to death was Repin, the famous artist. No man could give a true picture of the horror and terrorism that had cursed Russia during the last eight months.

PEASANTS ANTI-BOLSHEVIST

Practically the entire membership of the co-operative societies, he said, was anti-Bolshevist and pro-ally, and the organization was being persecuted in every way possible by the Bolsheviks. The great majority of the peasants were now against the Bolsheviks. So bitter were they that they were retaliating by planting small crops and refusing except under compulsion to deliver supplies of any kind to the Bolsheviks.

In the Moscow district only 3 per cent. of the industries were being operated when Mr. Martiushin left, and these were not running at full capacity. Shipping on the Volga, Oka, and other rivers was a thing of the past.

Dora Kaplan, the woman who attempted to assassinate Lenin, was subjected to a new form of torture before she was executed. By order of the Bolsheviks her guards were instructed not to permit her to sleep. For days she was kept awake, and then was executed without trial of any sort.

Mr. Martiushin said that the official Bolshevik reports indicated the extent of the executions taking place in Russia. In one province in one month these reports admit the execution of 800 people out of 6,200 who were arrested. In another report it is stated that 620 out of 1,500 arrested were executed. In Jaroslav for July the reports admit the execution of 300 men, and in Perm for the same month of fifty members of the

bourgeois class. Mr. Martiushin corroborated the testimony of Roger Simmons of the American Embassy in every detail regarding the forcible control of rural Soviets.

"I am a Slav," said the witness. "Most of my life I have been in Russia, and I think I know my country perhaps better than some people who go there and remain only a few months."

ANSWERS COLONEL ROBINS

Colonel Vladimir S. Hurban, Military Attaché of the Czechoslovak Legation, issued a statement in answer to Colonel Robins's charges against the Czechoslovak forces in Russia. The statement says in part:

Colonel Robins stated: "The Soviet Government granted free passage to the Czechoslovaks through Archangel and Murmansk, not through Siberia." This is incorrect. The Czechoslovak National Council, of which I was a member at that time, made an agreement with the Soviet Government on March 26, 1918, guaranteeing the passage of our army through Siberia. We desired to prove our neutrality in the civil war and our loyalty to the Soviet as the *de facto* Government by disarming, and we disarmed. This circumstance is the best proof of our loyalty. Archangel could not be considered because the port was frozen, and the northern regions could not feed an army of 60,000 men.

Concerning Colonel Robins's remark that "every one is telling of how the Bolsheviks are terrorizing and shooting people, but nobody says anything about the terror caused by the Czechoslovaks in shooting the Bolsheviks," Colonel Hurban said:

With all firmness I reject this general accusation, and I reject the comparison with Bolshevik tactics. The Bolsheviks admit terror officially as a weapon against their adversaries. We disclaim any terror. Colonel Robins must know that thousands and thousands of Red

Guards had been captured and disarmed by us, but were not punished or interned in camps, but released to go home. Germans and Magyars in the Red Army were not considered by us as fighters for Russian Soviets, but as our old enemies.

It would be naive and academic if I were absolutely to deny that some of our soldiers in different places did unlawful things. No army chief can deny this of his army. But everything was done by our command and our volunteer soldiers themselves to avoid or diminish and punish such cases.

In a letter to *The New York Times* of March 10, 1919, Mme. Catherine Breshkovsky denied the truth of the assertions made by Colonel Robins concerning the Czechoslovaks in Russia and their methods against the Bolsheviks. Colonel Robins in his testimony had referred to Czechoslovak "atrocities," citing among others the lining-up of inhabitants of villages and relentlessly shooting them down. Mme. Breshkovsky, on the contrary, after recounting in detail the circumstances leading to the march of the Czechoslovaks across Siberia, which she had witnessed, declared that they had been hailed as deliverers by all and "esteemed as brave warriors, most perfect gentlemen, and splendid citizens." They were admired especially for their humanity, their sense of honor. She had never, she declared, heard a complaint against them, never a derogatory remark. "All intelligent Russians are proud to have them as brothers," said Mme. Breshkovsky, adding in conclusion: "If a man, called as a witness, can insinuate about and slander a whole people and a whole army, known well to all the Russian people as the model of honor and humanity, what credit can be given to all the assertions made by him at second hand, or even, as he says, from his personal knowledge?"